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See Sample Puzzle at Upper Right!

This concept appears in puzzles like the DAMP!! PUZZLE at right. Note how we filled it in. It was identical to the objects and found that certain letters in the names of the objects stood out from the rest, thus to spell out the name of the famous person pictured at the bottom. Read the explanation carefully.

Note how we identified each object with a word of an essay listlet as there are lots in diagram accompanying it. In upper left we find a word SHOE in upper right, THE. In lower left, BIGIR, in lower right, PURSE. Note that some of the listlets fit into boxes with a little circular frame inside. Those circled listlets, arranged into proper order, spell out the famous name we are looking for.

Here, for example, the "circled" letters are I I E R U. So we run through the names printed under the puzzle and discover Isabel R. Uhl, whose last name is the correct solution, and whose picture you see at bottom.

SAMPLE PUZZLE

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SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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AN EDITORIAL ON

SERIALS

For a good many years, in a lot of magazines, we've been noticing that readers write angry letters that are filled with protests against serials, and then calmly rate the serial installment as first choice among the stories. This is one of those puzzles which we haven't solved, and never expect to understand.

Of course, back in the days when a story was written with exactly twelve cliff-hangers so that it could be cut up into that many installments, it was nothing in the world but a trick to make the reader buy the magazine each time. But those days are gone. Today, it's taken for granted that a serial is simply a story too long for one issue, which is split up into about three installments. And readers have repeatedly shown that they want long stories.

Still . . . it's pretty obvious that many today do not want to wait too long for a story, and that they haven't the patience to save the issues for the final installment. Something apparently has to be done about that.

We've been wracking our brains for the answer. We want to use the best of the long stories. But we don't want to annoy even a minority of those who buy the magazine—for obvious reasons! And we've finally come up with what we hope will prove to be a satisfactory compromise.

From now on, we'll run longer installments. Most of the time, we'll try to get a complete book into no more than two separate issues of the magazine, in addition to the regular line-up of stories. In rare cases, involving stories much longer than the usual book is today, we may have to run it in three installments; but we don't expect to find many such books which are exactly what we want in our longer stories.

Second, we'll run original *novels*—not serials in the old meaning of the word. There will be no demand for artificial cliff-hangers, and we won't deliberately try to leave the readers on the edge of their

chairs. We'll try to divide the story at a logical place, where the next installment can be conveniently begun.

And finally, we won't buy any long story just to be sure that we have a serial. If we don't have a serial, we can always make up an issue of complete stories without it making our hair turn gray with worry. The only reason we'll ever buy a serial is because we think it's a good story, which should be published, and which our readers will be happy to see in our pages.

How does that sound? It strikes us as the most logical answer to the conflict between readers who hate serials and others who write in and insist we run the long stories—and surprisingly, while the anti-serial letters are more vehement, the pro-serial ones outnumber the others by about five to one!

You'll notice that this applies to future serials. On the current story by Erik van Lhin, we'd rather not speak. But since we're getting used to having our faces red, we might as well say at once that we pulled, another blooper. We expected to have the conclusion in this issue—and instead, it's going to run on to a fourth installment. Blame it on van Lhin, who seems to be one of those writers who worries over his work; not content with rewriting it for us on his own once, he just recently sent a new revision of the last half to us. Well, it had a better story line in some ways—but it was also a good deal longer.

Most of the magazine was already made up. And the only thing left to do was to split up the conclusion (in its new version) into two parts, or else go ahead with the older version. Since we felt that the newer form was somewhat better, we're naturally going to choose it.

Definitely, positively, and finally, however, there will be no more than four installments all together! Next issue will have the last of this story, even if van Lhin decides he'd like to turn it into an epic!

And thenceforth, when serials rear their ugly heads, you'll get them in the longest installments we can run, and spread over the absolute minimum number of issues. Your response to Gallun's "Ten to the Stars"—which has drawn more favorable comment than any other story we've used—shows that you definitely don't object to having a lot of pages filled with one story.

And keep your letters coming. We're trying to give you the magazine you want, and we hope you'll continue to let us know of any improvements or changes that seem desirable. It's up to you!

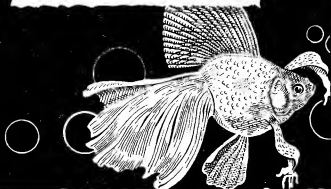
PHILIP ST. JOHN

LEGACY FROM MARS

BY RAYMOND Z. GALLUN

ILLUSTRATED BY EBERLE

Marty and Martia, quite naturally, came from Mars. But even after all the fuss and bother they made, it was hard to see why a couple of such creatures should want to join the exhibits in the Museum of Natural History.





I remember how it was. We found Marty and Martia wriggling in a puddle at the rim of the north polar icecap of Mars.

Marty didn't resist capture very much. In fact he sort of flipfopped toward us, as if he was curious, or sociable and lonesome. Martia had less romantic adventure in her nature, and more sense. She put up an awful fight for a creature so small, flopping and scrambling out of that puddle of ice-water, and showing real strategy in trying to evade our gloved fingers and to slip into a safe chink in the accumulation of melting hoarfrost. Except for not wanting to desert Marty, she would have gotten clean away.

But at last we had them both safe in a big pan, with water in it, and a lot of the green algae that thrives in those parts in summertime, and is considered an elegant addition to fine soups on Earth. To make the prison complete, we covered the pan with an algae strainer of wire mesh.

Mostly, we were jubilant. By "we" I mean Terry Miklas, half Greek and half Irish, twenty years old, then, and musically ambitious; and myself, John Durbin, dubbed Popeye by Terry—which was all right with me, since the original comic character is supposed to have been a

good sort with a deep voice. I was the supposed mate of our ship, the *Searcher*. Mr. Brunder, our captain, still wasn't present. He had become a bad headache to us both.

However, for the moment, Terry and I just peered at our captives. Whatever his other limitations, the kid was quick with names. "Poor little things, Popeye," he crooned, "Marty and Martia, the Martian goldfish . . ."

Muffled by his plastic oxygen helmet and the thin atmosphere of Mars, Terry's voice sounded even more soft and sentimental.

The creatures were green with some glints left in it—like fake gold that is giving its phouiness away. Marty was about as long as your hand; Martia, whose sex we guessed by her more retiring nature—a possible error—was a trifle shorter. The green, we know now, was from their being partly vegetable. Nowadays much of the fauna of Mars has to be like that, because of the scarcity of free oxygen in the air, and even, sometimes, dissolved in what water there is. A green plant can draw energy right from the sun, and free its own oxygen.

You could see Marty's and Martia's vital organs right through their tough but semi-

transparent hides. Later we learned that much of what we saw was brain-tissue. Two pairs of eyes bulged like black beads. Martia's little flippers, tipped with claws almost like fingers, tapped appealingly at the side of the pan, while she looked upward at us, and seemed to plead. But Marty just hovered near her, his mouth opening and shutting as his gills worked. Like his mate, he was a dainty, rather beautiful little creature. But now he looked stupid—which, I decided, must be the case—trusting us enough to let us catch him and Martia! Yeah—who was I to know he was only playing dumb?

"Poor little things!" Terry crooned again. "Dammit all, Popeye—let's let 'em go . . ."

Yes, that was the way Terry Miklas was—soft-headed, impractical, ready to give up the opportunity of a lifetime because his heart is hurt a little.

"Are you nuts?" I growled. "There are guys who claim to have seen these critters scrambling around the Martian icecaps. But nobody ever caught even one, before—though big rewards have been offered. You know how bone-dry most of this crazy planet is! Fishlike critters left alive on it? Only fossils are known . . . Figure if you can what some big, well-financed

scientific organization would give . . ."

Terry kicked my boot. I turned. Approaching from toward our ship, and glowering behind his whiskers, was our Captain Brunder. Ordinarily he didn't scare me, even with the awful grouch he'd developed this trip. But now, in a delicate matter which, after all, did have roots of sentiment, he seemed to belong about as well as a howling Martian dust storm over a bed of tender violets.

I had a helpless impulse to try to hide the pan that Marty and Martia were in. But in that level, featureless country, where only our simple machinery for gathering and processing the algae, stood beside a few wind-worn monoliths and low, dry growths and the vast flatness of the icecap, shallow, and gilded by the small, low sun, except where the few long blue shadows were cast, there just wasn't any effective place of concealment.

The kid was edging in front of that pan, and backward toward it. He was trying to hide it from Brunder's view, of course; but a backward kick of his boot would also overturn it and set our captives free, if he could get a step closer. With all this, I even somehow sort of sympathized, now. But Terry's

grin of innocence was obviously counterfeit. His ineptness in practical matters included an inability to bluff.

Now Brunder let go at him with his big mouth. "Stop in your tracks, you mouth-organ-tooting, know-nothing gold-brick!" he yelled. "If you weren't too dense, I'd say you were trying a stunt! Yes, you, Miklas! Who else? For what do I pay you, I wonder? For gabbing and tooting? Get to work, I say! Or by God, I'll leave you marooned on this stinkin' planet! . . ."

Yes, Brunder was mostly just in his usual fine form of this trip—which had been yak, yak, yak at the kid every chance he got. I was not only his mate and half his crew—Terry being the other half, if you discount Brunder's cat, Toby—I was his lesser partner; which means, I suppose, that I once thought he had good points—not that even later I didn't want to judge him generously. You see, he'd been chasing money-colored rainbows most of his life, and not ever finding much of the stuff naturally made him sour. Now, totting edible algae to Earth in the battered old *Searcher*—get the hopeful name?—was a last-ditch deal. I had been bitter, myself.

Just the same, Brunder got my goat, now. Terry had

worked about as well as any green spacehand can. So why ride him? I was as big and ugly as our captain. Now I turned impudent. "Aw—dry up, Brunder!" I growled.

For a second I thought that he would explode in my face. But then he saw that pan, and the movement inside it. His face showed surprise, then dumb unbelief—then a big Satanic grin. Yeah—Marty and Martia were colored green and gold; and I'll give you two guesses about what that reminded Mr. Brunder of.

"Well, well, well, boys!" he growled, his tone all honey and alum, mixed. "Look what was here all the time, though you never noticed! Your old Captain Brunder will just reap the proper rewards of his sole discovery, and you two thieving chiselers can go gabbling on!"

He had the pan in his big mitts, and was marching grandly back toward the ship's airlock.

At first I was ready to pile onto him, myself. And for once the kid's narrow face went all crinkled and thundery, and his fists balled, though he was slight in build.

"Steady, Terry," I said. "I've just come to realize. He's trying to rib us. He'd like to cheat us, but he can't. There are laws

that work. I'll handle him, when the time comes."

Marty and Martia got a place in the captain's cabin, with a nice sunlamp, turned comfortably low, glowing over them. Mr. Brunder made Terry Miklas help him rig up this special comfort, while I and Toby—the big tomcat who was Brunder's one concession to affection—watched. Toby was a lot like Brunder, even—big-jowled, whiskery, cussed, and somewhat pompous.

"We've got to be properly hospitable to *my* distinguished guests, *Pisces Martis*," Brunder, who liked scientific language, pronounced, meaning to taunt Terry and me. "But don't think, Durbin and Miklas, that we aren't going to finish taking on a cargo of algae. Don't think it for a minute!"

Toby, afflicted by covetous anticipation of his own, rubbed his flanks against me, purring. But Brunder had words for him, too.

"As for you, you devil," he growled, "you bunk out of my quarters tonight! Get fresh, and I'll put you clear outside the ship—without your air-helmet on! . . ."

Yes—Brunder had one of those things for his cat—same as a lady tourist, visiting a domed Terran settlement on

Mars, has for her pet poodle. Quite a character that Brunder was.

But we were all in on something much bigger than we knew.

Later, while Terry and I were out straining algae again, and pressing it into blocks, maybe we got a closer understanding of our true position.

"Popeye," Terry said musingly. "I'm thinking, and I'm sort of scared. What have we got on our hands, anyway? Oh, Marty and Martia are real enough, but somehow they remind me of things like elves and fairies, and the treasure in Alladin's cave . . . Get it?—almost the same mood, somehow—Sweet-and-Strange and What-Do-We-Know? I like that a lot, but it bothers me . . . The real man-sized Martians that weren't men had wonderful skills and sciences, but have been extinct for millions of years . . . And little fishlike creatures would have to be pretty smart to survive so long on Mars, wouldn't they?"

"Uhuh," I agreed absently, feeling a little cold, too, with pendant mystery—apart, even, from the old wind- and dust-scarred ruins that I'd seen brooding under the deep blue sky.

Life went on, nothing very obvious happening at first. At

off-moments Terry would play his harmonica or guitar. Old tunes, mostly. I didn't understand so well what a youngster interested in music wanted in space. But Terry tried to explain: "It's strange grandeur, stars, weird difference of scene, and a need to keep looking for something special to express, Popeye . . ."

From that kind of jumping-off point, Terry would get onto another inevitable subject, if Brúnder didn't interrupt. In the quarters I shared with him, I had the picture of a girl; blonde, as pretty as a flower, as mischievous as an imp, and as unlike me as new metal is unlike rust, though they tell me that the eyes are much the same. Sure—Alice always wished that she had been born a boy so that she could go right off into space with her old man, instead of studying in college.

"Nope—you're not so prejudiced in her favor, Popeye," the kid would assure me. "She sure looks wonderful. I hope I'll meet her, sometime, or at least get a letter . . ."

Soon after, I'd go to sleep in my bunk, and I'd dream—with vague unrest—of the kind of little Earthly fish that can creep out on the shore for awhile, or of mice scrambling around and squeaking. This, when there

haven't been mice in spaceships for a long time, not even in the old *Searcher*—no thanks here to Toby, but to the simple trick, easily and early discovered, of letting the air out of the hulls—or letting in the killing vacuum of space—for a few minutes, periodically.

Those dreams of mine—garbled echoes of what was really happening, shall we say?—were only the beginning. Because very soon Mr. Brúnder had a complaint.

"What I'd like to know," he growled at breakfast one morning, "is who has been putting string and wire and junk in the water with my *Pisces Martis*? It looks like the trick of an un-instructed child."

"Why—Sir—wire? String? Junk?" Terry asked in obvious puzzlement.

"You heard me," Brúnder stated flatly. "For your information, I'll keep my cabin locked from now on."

Until then, Terry missed even the implied accusation, which included intrusion on a captain's privacy. But now something flared up in his eyes, until I had to touch his arm once more, in warning. He sure liked Marty and Martia, and neither of us had looked upon them once—as far as I knew—

since they had been installed in Brunder's quarters.

"Something must be up, Terry," I said later, when we were outside, alone.

"I know," he answered almost gleefully, now. "Mr. Brunder doesn't realize it, but *his Pisces Martis* have been out of that pan—out from under the strainer that covers it, and back in again—after scrounging around for things they want!"

I felt a small chill, again. But after a moment I said, "That sounds innocent enough, Terry. What do you expect Marty and Martia to do? Build up some weird super-apparatus from odds and ends? Demonstrate strange, miraculous powers? They may be humanly intelligent, or even better than that. But they don't seem the kind to bother with a complicated civilization and science."

Terry thought that over. "Those things I didn't even think of, Popeye," he chuckled at last. "But some powers may be very simple, and may depend only on a difference—like being little and mysterious, and rather legendary, for instance. Take some historic diamond, for example . . ."

Well, we got the *Searcher* fully loaded with algae that day, and the hatches secured. That day even Brunder worked

hard. The *Pisces Martis* surely had a power over him. It was as if he had the crown jewels of some lost empire in his pocket. Maybe I sort of felt the same, because this was my deal, too, and Terry's, whether Brunder tried to make it seem different or not.

We spent our last night on Mars. Tired though he was, Terry had to lie on his bunk, doodling with his mouth-organ for awhile, before going to sleep. Because we were about to blast off for Earth, he played *Home Sweet Home* through a few times, softly. Yes, it's an old, old tune, and sentimental. Sometimes I'd say it was corny. After awhile I fell asleep.

I awoke at an indefinite time later with Terry gripping my shoulder in the dark, and whispering tensely: "Shhhh! Listen!"

Yes—I heard it. It was like a tiny xylophone playing—faintly, as if far off, though it must be nearby. There, unmistakable, were the opening bars of *Home Sweet Home*. But then the shift was smooth to some other kind of music, which I was sure no men had ever heard before . . . Because its movement and tone—everything about it—was swift and different, and outside of human art, somehow, though it kept its appeal. I was still

half asleep, though fighting for full consciousness. But maybe this condition sharpened the music's power for me. It tinkled and soared and reached out.

I thought of the Mars of ages past, a younger, populous, more verdant planet, whose people were not extinct through war, but at the height of their glory. And maybe I thought of little lesser beings, idling ornamentally, deep in a pool of a palace garden, perhaps . . . Yeah, sentimental the visions got, even for me, John (Popeye) Durbin . . . And then in a questioning ripple of elfin notes, the music died away, and didn't return again, though Terry and I waited for several minutes.

The kid's fingers had never left my shoulder. Now they dug deeper into my muscles. "Was that sort of thing—somehow—from—Marty and Martia?" he grated thickly. "Sure . . . It's got to be! . . . But how—with *what means*? . . . And—is *that* the way they are, Popeye? Musical? And did they ever hear me play—somehow—before they came to us? That is, were they—*drawn*? . . . Of course! Remember? A few times I was blowing my smallest harmonica—holding it in my mouth—*inside* my oxygen helmet, and *outside* the ship, while we were

processing algae! That's it! They heard me, then! . . . Afterwards, they came . . . And now, they must have been making their music right here in our quarters, Popeye! They're out of that pan in Brunder's room again! They're here—someplace! Come on! Got to hunt! Got to find out more! . . ."

Terry Miklas, with the lore of Olympus and of the leprechauns of Ireland in his background, was all steamed up. Nor could I blame him. For between himself and two little creatures of Mars he had found a thing of solid kinship. Music.

He bounced out of his bunk, and proceeded to fairly take our quarters apart. With less vigor, I helped. But except for small openings in the bulkheads, where various pipes and conduits ran, we found nothing. Marty and Martia, one or the other or both—in their nocturnal and amphibious prowling—had departed.

To me was left the tough job of quieting Terry's impatience and frustration, and his just curses against Mr. Brunder for keeping the *Pisces Martis* away from us, in his own cabin.

"Simmer down, fella, and keep the peace," I growled. "A little while, more or less, won't matter. You'll learn all you want to know, and things'll straighten

out. Likely as not, our musicians in miniature will come back here themselves. Now let's get some sleep!"

Terry looked angry for a second; then grinned sheepishly.

"Sorry," he muttered. "And thanks."

At dawn we blasted off heavily from Mars. Small pinwheel jets started the ringlike hull of the *Searcher* rotating, to give us the comfort of an artificial gravity, induced by centrifugal force.

Ship-time, split into three watches, now took the place of natural, planetary night and day. Over two months it would take to reach Earth—an interval in which much promised to happen, for much already was queer.

Events went on occurring after we got into space, though many of them not visibly. During Brunder's intervals of duty, or while he was asleep, there were apt to be more sounds as of mice scampering in the hidden byways of the ship, too narrow for human passage—a laugh on Brunder, for these were signs of the free rambling of small characters, basically aquatic but native to Mars, and hence, by necessity, not too bound to their proper element. In fact, the rich Earthly air of the *Searcher*, some of the oxy-

gen of which their gills and skins must have been able to absorb, must have extended their out-of-water range considerably.

Maybe Brunder knew all this. Anyway, his door stayed locked. But I'd known him quite awhile—good and bad—and I could read the old robber pretty good, even when he tried to clam up. I could also taunt him. Captain—hell! He was my partner, and he was way out of line! Clubbing him would have borne us quicker fruit, but taunting was more peaceful and more fun, and it could get results.

"Today even your whiskers look joyful, Brunder," I laughed once. "Have you learned something about *Pisces Martis*—so-called by you—that makes you imagine that they are worth an even bigger bundle of money than you supposed in your first delusions of grandeur?"

Then, just hours later, I had another dig, also with probable grains of truth behind it: "What's the matter, Old Pal? You look mixed up and angry—even down-right scared. Have these mysterious creatures, which of course were found by and belong to the kid and me, revealed qualities to you there in the secrecy of your lair, which makes you suspect that they're more than you can

handle? Still you want to keep them all to yourself, eh—Whole Hog? I wonder if we'll find you gruesomely murdered? Maybe you should lock yourself in your cabin, *alone*, Brunder . . ."

Yes, I knew that these comments struck home at least partly, by the way he reacted. There were no enigmatic grins of cockiness; there was just a sour and rather helpless snarl—"Shut up, Durbin!"

And very soon another thing took place, to heighten the effect on Brunder, though it happened to his cat. Toby didn't tell me the precise details; but suddenly, and for quite awhile afterward, he was a mighty terrified feline, staring wildly into corners and spitting, his fur puffing out like a balloon at the least movement. His eyes were all bloodshot, and his nose was swollen far out of shape. This was the first evidence we had that our little friends were not to be handled without gloves—which we'd been wearing the time that we had touched them—that their flippers carried a potent sting.

Brunder had to catch and medicate, and try to calm down his tomcat. To hear him crooning, "Poor Toby," was incongruous, comic, and for once somewhat pathetic.

I am sure that my campaign

of ridicule would soon have forced Brunder to bring the pan, serving as Marty's and Martia's residence, out into the open again, for all of us to see and observe how they lived. But incidents moved so fast that in the end that became pointless.

One enigma I was especially glad to see cleared up within forty-eight hours of our departure for Earth, because it had been driving Terry Miklas fairly wild.

"Their music, which we haven't heard since, Popeye," he kept saying. "Is it vocal—or what? Dammit, I gotta know!"

To this end he kept playing his harmonica or his guitar softly, during his off-time, hardly sleeping at all, hoping that they'd be drawn to him, and that he would hear the tiny xylophone again, and see.

So it happened, when we were both off-watch, and sprawled on our bunks. We noticed nothing of the silent entry. But suddenly there was a tinkly warble of sound—a sort of chord, molded like a questioning chirp. Both of us looked toward its source, which brought our gaze to the shelf over the washbasin. Up against the glass tumbler which I used for brushing my teeth, was a little gold-green shape—Marty, it must be. Two claw-tipped flippers were cupped to-

gether against the thin vitreous material. The beady black eyes were watchful. Like many a little animal on Earth, he knew how to stay perfectly still.

To be sure not to frighten him, I moved only my eyes. And Terry had only to lift his fingers a few inches to bring his harmonica to his lips. He blew one enquiring ripple of notes on it. Then we waited and watched. For each of us in our opposite bunks, the distance of our visitor from our eyes was only about a yard. Yes, this was surely Marty, the bold one, and we saw just what he did as again strange, haunting music, as of some tiny xylophone, honored our quarters. For maybe five seconds it lasted; then it died away.

There was a long pause before Terry Miklas said: "Did you see how it works, Popeye? His claws, vibrating rapidly against the glass of the tumbler, made the tinkling. The way his flippers were cupped and placed and shifted, at the same time, must have varied the pitch and modulated the sounds. That's all there is to it, then. I suppose any sort of fairly resonant material would serve as well as a tumbler, though with a different musical quality. Maybe that's why, from what we hear, Marty and Martia like to collect

junk in the place where they live—to see what sonic quality they can get out of it . . ."

Terry sounded quiet and relieved, now, as if at an enigma solved. But I wasn't so satisfied, yet.

"Okay," I said. "We understand that much. But there are more mysteries. For instance, is the music instinctive, like the singing of birds? Or is it created, consciously—as an art? What I mean is—is *mind* working here, Terry?"

The kid chuckled, and a funny smile came to his lips. "Did you hear what the man asked, Marty?" he remarked. "Yep—there are lots of questions. Me—I'm wondering what you came to us for—out of your native icecap—that first time. Oh, there was my mouth organ blowing, of course. But there's always a quest beyond music, isn't there? Me—I've felt it too. What is it with you, Marty? Or don't you quite know, either? Except that maybe there's distance and time and strangeness in it."

Terry's own restlessness was in his musing tone. Of course he didn't expect an answer. But in a way, he got one.

The little green-gold figure reared up against the tumbler again. Flippers were cupped and pressed against its surface.

Claws vibrated. What came forth was still a tinkling; but it was molded—or modulated—by those small handlike members, as tongue and lips mold a human voice, to form syllables and words:

"Kkorrekkt—Mmmarrtee?"

Yes. Call it another approach to vocal speech—used just in parrotlike mimicry, or with the potentials of real speech that might be learned, behind it. Real communication between aliens? There had been other intelligences in the solar system. But today, until now, at least, Man knew only himself.

Startled, Terry and I both sat suddenly bolt upright in our bunks. It was a mistake, for Marty was startled, too. He flopped from the shelf to the deck, and skittered away, seeming to run on his flippers, no doubt to return to Brunder's quarters and Martia by a route best known to himself.

I felt a chill and a thrill. "Things get better and better," I laughed. "Well—another time, Terry . . ."

We didn't realize then how near these glamorous little people who had come into our lives—with all the romantic and violent history of Mars in their background—could bring us to disaster. No, we are sure now

that it was not a designed and sinister plotting on their part; it was a more innocent and explorative tampering, like that of children. But in space that can be serious enough.

It was during my watch in the control room. Everything was at norm. The lights burned; the air-purifier units murmured sleepily. That was all. After a ship has full acceleration and is on a fixed course across the void, the rockets are silent; no machine moves except those necessary to maintain life and comfort. I was just sitting, reading a book, anticipating no trouble, of which there was no sign. Or had I heard a small, scrambling rodent-like sound?

Suddenly, though, one of the five big drive-rockets, mounted in a cluster at the center of our ship's ringlike hull, began to roar at full thrust. Since its companions remained inactive, it gave a one-sided reaction, that quickly had our old *Searcher* turning lazily edge over edge, like a spinning coin. Our other wheel-like rotation, to maintain centrifugal gravity, continued, but its effect, with new forces acting, became disturbed and confused. As an automatic alarm siren began to howl I toppled from my stool, went rolling and tumbling painfully up one wall to the ceiling, and down the

opposite wall to the deck again. But of course instead of stopping here, my cycle of tumbling proceeded to repeat itself at an accelerating rate.

Mingled with the thunder of that runaway rocket-tube and the siren's shriek, was the rattle of loose and rolling equipment and supplies, and shouts—from Terry and Brunder, aware now of danger, and no doubt trying rather helplessly to reach the control room. But in a matter of seconds the ship would be spinning—like the coin I mentioned—so fast that we'd all be pinned down by centrifugal force. The rate of spin, driven by that loony atomic jet, would go right on mounting inexorably, until the substances of various density composing our flesh—water, fat, and so forth—either separated into layers as in a centrifuge, or the ship blew apart.

Encouraged by its absolute necessity, I managed to catch onto a girder on that second roll up the wall. Then like a crab I worked my way to the manual controls. First I cut out the robot piloting device, which must be the source of that rocket-tube's going haywire. Then I opened all rockets, and fiddled around a little with their throttles, to balance their thrust. That crazy roll ended.

Next I had to center the ship back on course, and use the opposed retard tubes, to cut the excess velocity we had picked up. All this was routine stuff, done by the time a somewhat bruised Terry, and a similarly bruised and trailing Brunder, arrived in the control room.

"You okay, Popeye?" Terry began. "Just knocked around some? . . ." But of course Brunder's lusty roar drowned him out.

"What in hell are you doin', Durbin!" he hollered. "What kind of a nincompoopish trick was that you just pulled?"

He smelled of booze. He didn't drink too much ordinarily; but of late he'd been hitting the jug—I suspected not without reason. I'm no prim critic myself; but I do especially dislike being bawled out by a drunk when I'm sober. And now I had a suspicion which made me doubly sure that I wasn't going to take any blab from Brunder.

I went over to the robot piloting device, and banged on the side of its metal cabinet. Out of its bottom there skittered two little green-gold forms that quickly and prudently lost themselves among surrounding equipment.

"Brunder," I said, "I thought that *you* had made yourself personally responsible for *Pisce*

Martis. So why do you let them try to take the insides of the robot pilot apart?"

Well, first he just stared, looking sort of sick and defeated. Then he was muttering to himself: "Hell! Still getting out? . . . I tied down that mesh cover . . . And there was no sign . . . Smart, they are . . . Like people! . . . Gonna be rich, if I live . . ."

Yeah—so you see how Brunder's mind worked. But with the job on my hands of getting things put back into place aboard the old *Searcher*, and maybe capturing and restraining the habitual runaways, I couldn't dwell on the matter. Brunder did help me with the work. By the end of my watch, order was restored. There was also a gratifying development when I returned to quarters.

Terry met me there with a wide grin. "I've got them, Pop-eye," he announced. "Marty and Martia. They came to me, of their own free will, for refuge. So we've got them away from Brunder."

They were there in our washbowl, along with some water, and Martian algae for food, and a broken watch and a spool of fine-gauge copper wire which Terry had given them to fool with. He had also secured another wire mesh over their new

home, in the hope that this time it would restrain their wanderings.

"Good boy, Terry," I said. "Of course now *we* will keep Brunder locked out."

Up from the washbowl came a buzzing voice, which originated in small claws vibrating against that worn-out time-piece:

"Hhhellllo-o-o, Poppaiee-eee!"

"Hello, yourself!" I responded, startled.

Terry grinned wider than before. "You see, I've been teaching them," he declared.

Matters seemed to have taken a turn for the better. But this condition endured for only a few hours.

I was asleep when that warning siren shrieked again. First making sure that Marty and Martia hadn't escaped, I rushed out, not pausing to relock our door. I found no one in the control room. But a red light was flashing danger. Since there were no accompanying signs of trouble, I concluded that the difficulty was in the panel itself. I was right. It took me five minutes to correct a short-circuit, which began to seem unusual, anyway, as if arranged. This thought was belated. Still half asleep I must have been, to be so dull.

The kid would be in the galley, now, doing his extra chore of preparing dinner. Brunder was the one who should be watching the controls, but wasn't. Damn him, and my thick-headedness! What was he up to? I raced back to my quarters, and found my suspicions confirmed. Marty and Martia were gone from the washbowl! So were the algae and the water and the wire and the watch.

Passing the galley, I hollered to Terry. Together, we located our captain at the lower-level airlock. But just as we rushed forward, he closed the inner door on us, working the mechanism with the levers inside the lock-chamber, so that all we could do was peer in at him through the bullseye window of the door.

He held up something for us to see—a large whiskey demijohn of dark brown glass, its mouth plugged and waxed, and its wicker jacket removed. It must have been the same jug that he had been toiling to finish. But there was no whiskey in it now—just a murky, flaky liquid, and sinuous movement . . .

Brunder was wearing a space suit. Now, with an air of alcoholic drama and clowning, he opened the outer door of the airlock, and heaved the jug out-

ward with all his might. It sped away from the ship, growing quickly smaller, and then vanishing.

As far as I am concerned, if I could have opened that inner door just then, my boot would have sent our captain sailing right after that demijohn of his—into the vastness and eternal silence and cold of the void.

"*They* were inside that thing!" Terry Miklas said in a terrible voice, just above a whisper. "Marty and Martia! You must have seen them, too! Has there ever been such an example of senseless, drunken meanness? . . . Don't try to stop me from fixing Brunder this time, Popeye!"

Yeah—slight though Terry Miklas was, the way his face looked then, there was murder in the offing. Up to then, I might have helped commit it. But I'm a peaceful, patient fella—maybe to a fault. Besides, now, certain thoughts came to me. So, at the instant that Brunder unbolted that inner door, I grabbed Terry, and hung on with all my might.

Brunder swaggered and staggered forth. Of course he wasn't very vulnerable in a space suit, as he no doubt knew. Muffled a bit, his voice reached us through his helmet.

"Finished," he pronounced.

"Dammitall—ff-finish-hed! No more trouble. Musical Martian f-fish gone for good! Can't have 'em wrecking my ship, can I? Captain's duty! Gotta protect the old *Searcher*, don't I? You gentlemen know that! So—banish the wonderful, pretty, music-makin' little devils! Give 'em a whiskey-jug planet! Haw-haw! . . . Must of come out of a whiskey jug, anyhow—same as Aladdin's genie out of a lamp! Haw-haw-haw . . . No—don't try to go after 'em in the life-rocket! . . . Fixed so you won't get it working till it's too late! Haw-haw-haw . . ."

Terry Miklas was practically frothing at the mouth, like a mad dog, by then. He couldn't even say anything. I guess he couldn't think of words terrible enough to throw at Brunder.

Still managing somehow to hold him, I hauled him off to our quarters, and in this privacy, proceeded to put him straight on a few points.

"Now wait a minute, Hot Head!" I growled. "The setup ain't what it seems! There's a bug in it . . . In the first place, I know Brunder, and he's not nearly as drunk as he pretends! In the second place, our little friends may look delicate, but they have some of the imperishable qualities of the elves they

resemble. They are used to freezing up and thawing out with the icecaps of Mars. Sealed in a demijohn of dark brown glass, which affords them effective protection from even the hard ultra-violet rays of the sun, they should be in no danger. In the third place, drunk or sober, Brunder would never throw away a chance to make a lot of money, no matter how much trouble and risk it had caused him. In fact, he really risked his neck facing you just now—which makes me sure that he thinks he's got something so big that it's like some vast treasure to him, over which he's gone considerably nuts, and ready to take longer and crazier chances to grab it all for himself . . ."

Here I paused to let my logic soak into Terry's head. Already he was showing calmer interest.

"In the fourth place," I continued, "though the interplanetary regions are enormous, anything moving in them—in a vacuum, that is, follows a fixed and mathematically predictable path, and can't be hard to trace and locate, as long as you know the starting point and the dominant vectors controlling direction and velocity, and an approximation of the lesser forces acting—for instance, the minor muscular forces with which

Brunder threw that jug from the ship. In fact the latter is about the only thing which distinguishes the motion of the demijohn from the motion of the ship—until we start using rocket power again to decelerate, and to modify our direction, slightly. Otherwise, the jug will follow right along with the *Searcher*, in a gradual inward curve toward the Earth, with a slight lateral drift of a number of miles per hour, imparted by Brunder's pitching arm. Offhand, I'd say that the demijohn will fall into a rather eccentric but planetary orbit around the sun, somewhat larger than Earth's orbit.

"Yes, Brunder has all the necessary data to figure out where the jug is at a given moment, and pick it up again. It's his trick to gain full possession of Marty and Martia—because we're supposed to think that they're hopelessly lost, if not dead. The catch is that I was in the control room, and have all of that data, too—I have the time, and the position and speed of the ship well in mind, and can do well enough with mathematics . . . Fifth place—well, I won't risk making you mad by even mentioning that . . ."

I stopped talking. Still, the way Mr. Brunder loved that old tomtcat of his kept hovering in

my mind, as evidence that even he would avoid deliberate cruelty to Marty and Martia.

Terry had cooled off a lot by now. In fact a kind of secret gleam came into his eye. "Thanks for the dope, Popeye," he said. "So we just ride out the trip to Earth, hand in our resignation notices well in advance, watch Brunder for tricks while cooperating with him generally, though not too well to make him suspicious; and get set to act fast as soon as we arrive home. Right?"

I nodded.

So it was. The remaining two months of journeying dwindled away tediously, but without special incident.

When we arrived at the White Sands spaceport, there was a complication. The feminine gender is a sweet nuisance. And Alice, my daughter, was there beyond the safety barrier of the grounding platform, to meet me, and also maybe to satisfy her curiosity concerning some comments about Terry Miklas, that I'd put into letters mailed from Marsport. Also, she had herself all shined up for a big homecoming celebration for me—at some grand restaurant, some place, I suppose.

So it was "Hello, Alice Honey—you look wonderful—this is Terry Miklas—Terry, meet

Alice . . ." Yeah—all this from me in one hurried gasp.

I knew by Terry's expression that he found her even more attractive than he had hoped; but the pressure of haste put him in an awful position.

"I'm very glad to know you, Alice," he stammered. "I—ah—in a couple weeks, I hope to show you how glad. Only, now—Dad and I have a very pressing matter to take care of instantly, and—I—"

Yeah—right away Alice cut in, protesting, her heart-shaped face going soft and hurt: "Dad! I see you so seldom, and—good night—can't I at least go along with you in this 'pressing matter'?"

We didn't have a half-hour or so to waste in explanations. Terry hadn't yet learned the difficulties of arguing with a woman, so I cut things short in the only way possible.

"Of course, Alice," I said. "Pull in your neck, and come on—night-out dress and all. I'd be ashamed to think you're the wilting kind. We'll find some old burlap and a space suit for you, some place."

Don't ask me how—by what scrapings of the last dregs of saved money, borrowing, and the use of friends for favors—we did what we did. Don't be kid-

ded—the operation of space craft large and small, will always be expensive, even if atomic power is supposed to be cheap. Anyway, inside of five hours of the landing of the old *Searcher*, Terry and I had rented a fleet little Warrington Dart, which bore us up through the atmosphere with a smooth acceleration that made even Alice's eyes shine, though she had seldom been off the Earth before.

I had my calculations all made and checked, and we took the shortest course possible, almost sure that Brunder couldn't have acquired a craft ahead of us.

But he had! Our radar showed the ghost of another Warrington, a few hundred miles beyond our bows, and sticking right to our intended path.

"The stinker!" Terry growled, his face twisted with strain. "Pour on the coal, Popeye! But not too much so that we have to waste a lot of time decelerating later."

I'm an old-timer, and he didn't have to tell me that. From my memory and my calculations, the velocity of objects moving in a planetary orbit at a somewhat more than Earthly distance from the sun, was in my head. About eighteen miles per

second. The rest, though, called for skill, something like that of a racetrack driver pitted against opponents; choosing just the proper instant for a controlled burst of speed—not too much or too little—curving in at just the correct angle for proper approach, with as small as possible a margin of error to be compensated for later. Uhuh—and I knew that I could advantageously go quite a bit faster than those eighteen miles per second at times—with good results . . .

Anyway I gained some on Brunder—maybe because he didn't notice soon enough that he was being followed. Then the two Warringtons stayed even-even, Brunder's ship reflecting a spark of sunlight up ahead. A few miles difference. So it was for five days. It was a tense time—not so good for young people to take care of love matters. But on a couple of occasions I saw Terry and Alice hand in hand almost absently, while they talked tensely about an unrelated subject.

"There it is—what you and Dad are looking for!" Alice said at last, pointing to a tiny dot on the radar screen. "You have said several times that it is a whiskey demijohn—have I got that straight?" Here her brows persisted in going puzzled and

amused, as if Terry and I were an awful pair of screwballs, to be rushing madly across space on such a quest.

Terry nodded and grinned sheepishly. "A whiskey jug world," he chuckled. "That sounds loony, I know. But it is inhabited by the nicest pair of little people you'll ever want to meet."

Well, now we were sweating the chase out—with the advantage remaining on the other side. We donned space suits. We had weapons, and presumably Brunder had them, too. I didn't intend to risk Planetary Patrol discipline by using mine, unless provoked. But we had to be ready . . .

My throat was getting raw from trying to swallow my tension, when, peering through my small telescope, I saw the airlock of the Warrington up ahead, open, and an armored figure leap out.

Terry also had a scope. He gave a yell, and scrambled for our own lock, meanwhile explaining: "I see it there—floating free—the jug! Brunder dived for it, drawing a tether cable behind him! He—no—he missed! A burst of speed, Pop-eye!"

I complied, and we leapt close very fast. Movement, then, was quick indeed. Terry jumped

from our lock without a tether. And he missed, too! No—not exactly! He'd missed Brunder and the demijohn, yes—but he'd caught Brunder's cable, between our enemy and the other Warrington. After that I didn't see some of what took place, because our ship, moving a little faster, now swept past, and I had to busy myself with the retard jets to get back on the scene.

Well, should I describe that brawl in space—the wide difference in weight—mass, that is, now—of the two opponents? The agility, the skill, the spirit? Let's skip the buildup. When I could see again what was going on, Brunder and Terry were grappling with each other. Brunder had of course been trying to draw himself back to his ship with his tether cable, for another leap at the jug, while Terry Miklas' aim was to prevent that. But now it was big muscles against lesser ones—or so I thought with sinking heart. Fighting in space is still fighting, though some points are a bit special. To hit an opponent can be a mistake. He's armored, and hard to hurt. Besides, he'll be propelled out of your reach, while, by reaction, you will be driven in the opposite direction.

Brunder did hit Terry—with

approximately the above results. Terry's clear plastic helmet was dented but not broken. He shot away; but instead of floating free he just slid along the now tautened tether cable, letting it slip through his gloved fingers. Then he leapt at Brunder again, jerking the tether to give his body the necessary impulse.

This time he got hold of Brunder's shoulders from behind—an extremely advantageous position. Because a space suit has a necessary soft spot, where flexibility for bending and sitting down prevents the manufacturers from putting any metal except light wire. Oh, there's ballooning effect from the air-pressure inside; but a metal-shod boot driven with even light force can easily overcome that.

Well, here was where Terry went to work, with a furious and methodical persistence, always hanging onto Brunder's shoulders. Kicks were followed by more kicks, till I thought it would never end. My peacable nature had been frustrating Terry Miklas too long.

Alice wouldn't watch. "You men, Dad!" she complained. "Come on—let me try my space-woman's skill at completing this curious comedy—getting the



demijohn that we came for, that is . . ."

There was no danger. With a tether, she too jumped from the lock, and like a football player grounding the pigskin, she grabbed the free-floating jug. I drew her back to the Warrington.

Terry and I took Brunder to his own small craft, and left him strapped in the pilot seat, where he sat groaning and cursing. Then we returned to our ship, and began the return trip to Earth, our minds only absently on this objective.

For we had what we had come to get. Maybe an adverse enchantment was ended. I even thought that maybe we would get rich.

The jug was half full of unfrozen water. The radiations of the fierce sun of space had been converted to heat by the dark brown glass. Inside, beyond cloudy masses of algae from Mars, were two small animated shapes that could not be mistaken.

Terry lashed the jug down. In these small craft there was no centrifugal substitute for gravity. We sat looking at the jug. Various factors about it produced a mixed pattern of whimsy, humor, and seriousness. Terry chuckled.

"You can hold it in your

hands," he said. "But as poor Brunder first hinted, it has all the attributes of an inhabited planet. It is even vaguely spherical. It has an atmosphere within it, and ample water, and a suitable climate for plants. The algae, with the aid of sunlight, provides both food for animal life, and oxygen to breathe. And it is a peopled world. Its one failure was its short duration as an effective free planet. Only two months in an orbit around the sun! But it was capable of enduring much longer—perhaps as many eons as a major world, even. Perhaps it might have gone on to who knows what great future."

Terry Miklas was kidding. Still his eyes held a speculative gleam—almost a sadness for the way we had terminated a possibility.

Alice looked strange, too.

In another moment we heard the tinkle of the elfin xylophone once more—Marty and Martia cupping their flippers against the inner surface of the demijohn, and tapping, and making the glass ring, and modulating the sounds they remembered from Terry's teaching:

"Hhhello-o-o, Tterreee . . . Ppoppaiee-ee! Weeee arrrr-r awlll frrrennnzzz! . . ."

Then, briefly, came the music, eerie and groping and faint,

older by far than the human race, and not of human creation.

I glanced at Alice. She looked at the little green-gold figures, bronzed and blurred through the tinted glass. Her gaze, meeting that of beady, intelligent eyes, was awfully soft. It made her beautiful.

"Dad, Terry," she said uncertainly. "Even from all your talk about Marty and Martia, I didn't know that they were like this!"

A mood came over me, too. I thought of another Alice—in a book—in Wonderland. Kid stuff? Lots of big, capable men I can think of, would disagree. Ah, yes—whimsy. The refreshing pause to find relief from the humdrum in charming nonsense:

"The time has come," the

Walrus said,

*"To talk of many things—
Of shoes and ships and
sealing wax*

And cabbages and kings

*And why the sea is boiling
hot*

*And whether pigs have
wings . . ."*

In another way the feel of all was here, too.

Through the sides of the demijohn, I saw evidence of artcraft on Marty's and Martia's part. There was a screen of algae fibre, woven as humans weave cloth or mats—warp and woof

in an over-under pattern. The screen was probably designed to provide shade from the sun, which I guess could get fairly strong, even inside the dark glass. The screen was held at the ends by an arrangement of copper wire—the same wire, doubtless, that Terry had once dumped into our washbasin aboard the *Searcher*. Old Brunder, with some thought of his own, had put it into the jug. And our friends had used it, demonstrating a primitive culture, beyond which they had no reason to go, except in music.

Now Terry Miklas gave a low, short whistle. Then his talk went rambling, again: "How was it like out here in space, in a world of your own, Marty and Martia? Was it hard to take, or was it peace? And did we just now spoil that? Do you want to return to Mars, or do you want to go much farther? Maybe someday we'll be really able to converse, and you'll be able to tell me how it is with yourself—if you know, as sometimes I think I don't quite know, about me. . . . Music is restless stuff."

"Go get your harmonica, Terry," Alice urged. "Play something for them. . . ."

Yeah—here was a nice dreamy young fella, born of various parentage in New York City.

And here was my daughter, not too unlike him in background. She had no superlative talent, though she was good at the piano. But then, here were a pair of mites, different from them about as completely as was possible—in size, structure, origin; maybe even in basic protoplasm. But between the two halves of this foursome—with almost no other language at all, yet, there was a bond of likeness and understanding.

So I guess that the pattern for the immediate future was already pretty well set, during those few days of returning to Earth. I had to guide the Warrington, being the only one who could still think of routine matters. Terry would be tooting on his mouth organ; then Alice would try it, too. Then Marty or Martia would tinkle a response, sometimes against the sides of the demijohn. Or they'd emerge from it for awhile, and tap against something else; sometimes it was notes that they produced, but as often it was words and phrases that they were learning to repeat.

Yes, in this romantic atmosphere of contrasting cultures and mystery, love bloomed very soon between Alice, my daughter, and Terry Miklas. It was a unity of interest, and of about everything else that counts, I suppose.

How would I know? I was just a mildly cynical but sympathetic outsider, whose consent, if it was needed at all, came about as easily and casually as anything could, two days before we got the Warrington back to the White Sands spaceport:

"Why sure, Terry and Alice . . ."

With that much settled, we got down quickly to another problem.

"Just what happens to Marty and Martia, Dad?" Alice asked.

"Umhm-m—what does?" I enquired. "We have an awful lot of expenses to meet, as we all know. It was expected that our small guests from the Red Planet would be instrumental in defraying them."

"Not if it means selling them, like chattels, into slavery in a zoo or museum, Dad!" Alice warned. "They are sentient beings, and our friends! Anyhow, there's another way—more lucrative in the long run. Like Terry they're artists. People will want to see them, and hear them play—in the theatre, on television, everywhere! All we need is a couple of weeks more—to perfect an act and a program for Marty and Martia, and maybe Terry, too—perhaps even me!"

"Lucrative" was the word that got me most. Yeah, money, that

means. It was the most reasonable subject that I had heard mentioned in quite a while. And I was proud to know that my daughter had a good, practical head.

Of course there are novelty numbers, and novelty numbers. Some take hold, some don't. The public can be pretty blase, even when you're dead certain that you have the best thing in the universe. I was sure we couldn't miss, yet I didn't know. Sadly I felt some hopes of at last having a few dollars to rub together, possibly being indefinitely postponed. But with both my daughter and my prospective son-in-law gone against the old plan, and with my own self leaning in that direction also, what could I do but stretch my luck a little further?

Terry and Alice got married in White Sands. Then there was a fast scramble for another loan—fortunately small this time. Included in our luggage when we moved to a couple of adobe shacks out in the desert, was a piano and a custom-made case, like a suitcase, but with a plastic tank inside.

I lived in the other shack, leaving Alice and Terry and their charges alone a lot. I roamed the nearby hills and kept watch, remembering the

recent past. Of course I kept a gun.

Our first try at show business was in Phoenix, Arizona, and all my previous doubts were instantly dissipated. The first agent's eyes fairly bulged at the demonstration performance, and he cussed in wonder. "Maybe you're fibbing about where you got these fish," he said. "But do I care?"

The sound-truck that belonged to a big local theatre of dignity was in the streets twenty minutes later, announcing solemnly: "A special fifteen minute feature will extend our evening program to 11:45 p. m. This is to introduce something sincerely unheard of by us before today. Something utterly charming from another world—Mars, we are told. Beyond this, words may fail us, or seem crudely sensational. Therefore, come and discover for yourselves. . . ."

So, that night, Marty and Martia performed to a packed house, and incidentally, to a far larger television audience.

I guess the basic framework of the program was corny. Terry Miklas was a rather shy and awkward master of ceremonies, keeping his harmonica and guitar with him to draw out and encourage Marty and Martia with his own music. Alice, at the piano, stayed in the back-

ground for the same purpose.

When Terry and Alice began to play, the star performers scrambled up a little wooden ladder and out of their tank, which was set on a table, and proceeded to enjoy themselves more or less extemporaneously on all the apparatus that had been arranged for them. *Home Sweet Home* came out on steel strings stretched over a sounding board, and on a tumbler, in unison, and to the end. But it was the only number that they played that anybody except Alice, Terry, and myself had ever heard before.

Very soon Marty and Martia were performing alone—funny, dainty, intent little monsters, the color of patinaed gild, and as beautiful as a childhood fancy. Now they were at the steel strings and the tumbler; now their claws vibrated a small drum, while they crouched on its head. Now their flippers were cupped against pieces of resonant wood.

Their music was faint and weird and aching, and it seemed to reach out endlessly with its eerie richness. The amplifier system took something away from it, until very soon Terry Miklas turned it off. Then, among those thousands of people in the audience, you could have

heard a pin drop. I was out there; I knew.

Marty and Martia played for seven minutes; then they retired independently to their tank, to freshen their gills. But back in the water, they didn't stop entertaining. They made the sides of the tank vibrate, pronouncing words that they knew:

"Hhello-o-o! Wwe-ee arrr-r ffrrom-m Mmarrrzz! Yuuu arrr-r owwrr ffrrennnzzz! . . ." they buzzed.

Some of this I shouldn't bother to tell. It is old, now, and everybody heard, at the time. The reports about Marty and Martia, who had no other names that we ever found out, went everywhere. And later performances were no less enthusiastically received than the one of that first night, when at times the audience was as quiet as the dead. At others, it roared with laughter, or brought the house down with applause. Encores extended that first show to fully three times its allotted fifteen minutes. The important play that preceded Marty's and Martia's act, was almost forgotten.

As the people got up to leave, I listened to the various comments—pleased, endearing, and comic. A surprising number of folks didn't believe what they had seen and heard.

"Trick stuff, sure, but I like good tricks," a fat man announced to a pal. "Ever hear the old joke about the drunk, the mouse pianist, and the miniature piano? . . ."

* At supper in our hotel, after the show, Alice's and Terry's faces shone like a couple of bright new pennies.

"We made it!" Terry Miklas said jubilantly. "Or rather—they did! It's an avalanche! I wonder if they appreciate all the flowers they got. . . ."

"What I'm trying to do is pin down exactly the secret of their success," I offered. "Of course I know—I *feel* the answer coming to me from all sides. But how do you get all of it into words? Let's see—well—in the first place their music would still be beautiful even if it was well-known instead of being completely novel. Then they're the only actual *sentient* beings—I think we can say that it is proven now that they are that, can't we?—other than Genus Homo of Earth, that anyone has ever seen. Then, behind them, is the mystic glamor of ancient Mars. A lot of the rest is whimsy. They're like little characters in a myth or legend which can't be, but that we all wish for. Yet they are—unbelievably—real. . . ."

"Yes, Dad!" Alice broke in

eagerly. "I hardly supposed that a rough spaceman like you ever thought along such lines! But you've got it pretty well stated! They have some of the charm of the Lorelei, and of fairy princesses and ruined castles and immortal woodland sprites and lost treasures—maybe even of Santa Claus! And they're *real*! They're a thing that our hard civilization wants and needs to rest itself—a little of special poetry, music, and magic! They're a very unique blend!"

Well, that night a dozen would-be sponsors discovered that possible remarks like "We're from Mars" could be made to rhyme with something about stars, and—just for example—some manufacturer's candy bars. The idea, of course, was to make up commercial jingles, and have Marty and Martia vibrate them out in words and tinkles. I guess it could have been done without much difficulty. But I felt very sour to the idea right away, as did Terry and Alice.

"We know that what we've got is good," I told these gentlemen. "We don't mean ever to corn it up."

No, I don't think we lost a thing, here, by taking a firm stand. In fact I believe we gained in quality and respect.

From Phoenix we swung west,

performing in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. Then we moved east again, to Minneapolis, and south to St. Louis and New Orleans, and up to Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland, and on to New York. By then the names of Marty and Martia were up in lighted letters so big that you could have flown our old freighter, the *Searcher*, right through them. Three brief weeks of this kind of glory we had in all. For the time being, we were cleaning up in a very practical manner. But in the long run the pair that were our bonanza turned out to be fool's gold. From the beginning, my memory and a hunch kept informing me that even those three weeks were borrowed time. Something bad just had to happen.

It was I who suggested a vacation up on the Maine coast. It was hot July, then. Terry and Alice agreed quickly. But I think that what we all wanted was not so much a rest, but, subconsciously, a place to entrench for trouble. Of course the subconscious mind isn't always very logical. The Maine coast was no shelter against the legal suit which was what I expected mostly—not that any of us minded paying off. But trouble, when you feel sure that it is on the way, but can't tell at what

moment, or just how it will make itself known, can be magnified into a nebulous phantom which frightens the deep, primitive part of a person. A legal contact could be one approach. But there could be others. Someone at night, for instance. With this in mind, we had hired two armed guards.

As matters turned out, we were taken by surprise for one vital instant. It was summer dusk, soft and rich. The day before, we had made an interesting discovery—final proof of Martia's femininity. Visible within her small, semi-transparent body, were a dozen tiny and incomplete duplicates of Marty and herself.

Alice was still smiling over this fact, there in the kitchen. Terry and I were also present, enjoying a pair of beers. The door to the garden was open. Fifty yards away a brook babbled. The Atlantic was half a mile distant. Right behind my chair, on another small table, was Marty's and Martia's plastic tank.

We heard footsteps grinding on pebbles. I turned, seeing dimly someone approaching from the garden—a man in slacks and checkered shirt and a hat. It could have been Mills, one of the guards, or a farmer neighbor . . . I know now, that, back

among the trees, he must have been waiting for a moment when neither Mills nor Davis, the other guard, were in front of our kitchen door. He came right on into the kitchen without a greeting, and in a startling instant, until he stood as close as I was to Marty's and Martia's tank, and in a better position to take hold of it.

Not till then did we realize who he was. I guess we were too used to seeing him in the cover-all of a spaceman. Besides, his scraggy whiskers were shaved off.

While Terry and I were scrambling furiously and defensively to our feet, he grinned kind of self-consciously, and said, "Hello, Durbin and Miklas. Weren't you expecting me—sometime? I guess I have certain rights of discovery, concerning these sensational beings, too. Financial ones, anyway."

Brunder's big hairy mitt was curved around that transparent tank. That was a bad circumstance, all around. My thought, then, was that he was talking about money, for which I acknowledge respect; though, where Marty and Martia were concerned, I realized more fully now that it wasn't the main thing with me. When we had returned to White Sands from space, after performing a rescue,

I hadn't worried too much about Brunder, feeling that his own nefarious attempt to grab the *Pisces Martis* for himself alone was too dangerously fresh for him to try legal action against us. But now that incident was a fading memory, and we had begun to look rich, and hence possibly guilty in the eyes of the world. So I was more wary, now. Maybe I misjudged him, but my further thought was still that Brunder just wasn't the kind to have any control over our small friends, whatsoever.

So I was all swift and perhaps ill-advised defensive action. I grabbed that tank, and he took hold of it tighter, and Terry leapt close to help me. For a second we all tussled; then all three of us went down on the floor. The tank, which we all still clutched, was overturned; its wire top came off, and its contents sloshed violently . . .

Alice gave an almost agonized cry. Terry said "Damn!" I used stronger language than that as I picked myself up for further action. But the last that any of us saw of Marty and Martia, they were scrambling away like mice into the thickening shadows of the garden.

"You numbskulls!" Brunder yelled sheepishly. "What in hell did you start messing with me,

for! All I wanted was to talk about my just rights, privately, letting bygones be bygones. Now look what happened!"

Our worthy ex-captain had a point there, I had to admit to myself—withal a doubtful one. But I had plenty of counterpoints of my own.

"Why didn't you announce yourself like a man, instead of sneaking around and barging in like a cockroach, Brunder!" I hollered back at him. "You could have had your stinking share of the money we got from the programs! For all I mind, you can still have it, and be damned!"

He looked glumly furious, but said no more just then. He and I followed Terry and Alice out into the garden, where they were calling "Marty!" and "Martia!" But the only answer in the young night was the sleepy and lonely chirp of the crickets, and—the babble of the brook nearby.

"That's it!" Brunder grumbled. "They would naturally have aimed for the water, wouldn't they?"

"Bright man, ain't you?" I snapped at him sarcastically.

"Knothead, yourself, Durbin!" he snarled.

"I've a hunch that they'd make right for the ocean, via the creek," Terry Miklas said musingly. "Hey—let's all get in

the car—drive down there right away! . . ."

So that was what we did, leaving the guards at the house. What practical good the excursion was supposed to accomplish, I don't know. At the abrupt rocky shore, the brook became narrow and deep and gushing—no place to look for two small fishlike creatures, though we tried that futilely with flashlights. A big white moon was rising out over the Atlantic, its light making a twinkling path on the waves. Millions of years ago the ocean must have been dreamy and enigmatic like this, as no doubt it still would be, for millions of years to come.

We all walked along the shore, looking out at the water helplessly. At last Terry Miklas started one of his absentminded soliloquies:

"Maybe the sea was what they wanted, what they came with us for. On Mars there haven't been any real seas for much longer than you can imagine. Trans-spatial migrants searching for a thing only dimly left in their race-memories—was that what they were? . . . We wanted to take care of you, Marty and Martia. But I guess you didn't feel free. Well, good luck. But the Altantic is awfully big and dark and deep. I hope you don't get into trouble in it. . . ."

After a minute, Alice asked sadly: "Well—what do we do now?"

"One thing we can do," I growled, "is get back to the house and figure up what old Stinker Brunder, here, thinks we owe him, and pay him off so he'll go away where we won't have to look at him any more. It's worth the price."

Mr. Brunder looked furious again, but maybe sort of hurt, too.

"Don't worry, Durbin," he snarled in return. "I wouldn't want anything that you thought was yours around me to make me itch! So you'll get a deduction of a few thousand from your check to me—to cover yours and Miklas' share of that load of algae brought from Mars in the *Searcher*."

"Ah—now it's Mr. Generosity, huh?" I sneered at him. "Listen, Brunder—I wouldn't let you forget that algae, or our share, or who did most of the work. . ."

It's funny how people are. I hated Brunder less now than I used to; yet I was riding him harder.

At the house I made out his check. He said "Thanks," and stalked away with awkward pride, which somehow made me recall how he used to scratch the back of Toby, that old tomcat of his, and of how once—have I

even mentioned that before this?—I thought I'd heard him croon to Marty and Martia, when he had them behind the locked doors of his cabin aboard the *Searcher*. But we sure had gotten on each other's nerves during that trip!

When he was gone I said to my daughter and son-in-law: "So is this the end of our strangest adventure?"

"I don't know, Popeye," Terry answered. "But I don't see how it could be. Because we don't know just what happened, or will happen, to our star performers. The adventure will go on, incomplete, until we find out. Or until somebody else finds out. And if nobody does, it'll go on forever."

The newscast people were out at dawn, and the news was given to the world. I guess most people remember. Right then some big commercial enterprises were exploring the cold moons of Jupiter, and beginning the hard-headed job of exploiting the mineral deposits there; but folks forgot all that for a little while. For their whimsical interests were drawn to a half-legend that had vanished again into the unknown, or had slipped into a new phase, leaving behind the memory of its reality. A million things were said by millions of people, and though the words

might be different, the message was usually about the same. Here, a realistic, sometimes cruel populace, charmed by something little and different, paused to be kind:

"Good luck, Marty and Martia, wherever you've gone. And may we meet again. . . ."

Oh, there was some fear, too—perhaps not entirely unreasonable. One newspaper headline went something like this: "SUPER FISH FROM MARS INVADE OCEANS. WITH INTELLIGENCE OF HUMAN LEVEL, WILL THEY MULTIPLY, MAKE PLANS? WHAT UNKNOWN DANGERS LIE AHEAD?"

These were thoughts which subsided as months passed, and the Atlantic remained unchanged, and the story of a brief visitation dimmed somewhat in most minds—Terry's and Alice's and mine not included.

Terry Miklas had early offers to go on making music for the public. He turned them all down.

"What they remember of me, Popeye," he said later, "is that I was one of those who introduced Marty and Martia. People want to hear and see me for that reason—which doesn't make my music worth listening to, in its own right—at least not yet. Besides, I've got to keep watch along the shore, here. Because

you-know-who may want to come back. . . ."

When I thought about it, Terry's purpose applied as well to Alice and me. Because Marty and Martia had been just about the biggest event in our lives.

We had expected to have a lot of money. When our debts were paid we were quite a ways from being broke, but we were down to an economy level. We kept the house we had rented there on the Maine coast. Now our watch began. Fishermen were keeping their eyes open, too, thinking that their nets might bring up one or both of the runaways, or maybe some of their progeny. But nothing like that ever happened, as far as we know. Though of course here was something to add to the numerous and ancient legends of the sea.

During those autumn days and evenings, Terry would walk alone along the rocky shore, or with Alice, or with both Alice and me; and he'd play on his harmonica—capturing some of the mood of the eerie music that we had all heard. He got better at it, as time went on; but improvement wasn't his first motive.

"Maybe my tooting will draw those darn fools back!" he'd growl.

The vigil went on into the

winter, when the Atlantic was often really something to watch—huge white breakers swirling and thundering in, and roaring like devils. I suppose that Terry Miklas' patrolling of the shore, blowing weird tunes on his mouth organ, in weather like that, will make another yarn of the sea—a folktale of peculiar devotion—that will last for centuries along that coast.

But there were occasions, too, of quiet and fog, like that one evening in January. In this mild weather, all three of us were out there along the shore again. Far out, we heard the bell of a buoy clanking sleepily. And Terry tooted on his mouth organ again—little dreamy, coaxing bursts and trills, that no human besides himself could have produced.

Suddenly he stopped, and cocked his head to one side eagerly, listening. Alice and I did the same.

"Hear that?" Terry whispered at last, tensely.

"Yes, Terry—yes!" Alice answered.

"I think so," I put in. "Wait! Shhh!"

Just for a second the slurring, questioning notes were there, dim but unmistakable—coming from among the nearby rocks.

But when we had scrambled to the water's edge, there just

wasn't any more music, though Terry Miklas blew and blew on his harmonica. The sounds, as of a miniature xylophone, had faded for good. Our flashlights, boring through the fog, revealed only many seashells among the rocks.

"A shell," Alice mused.

"They're alive, anyway—at least one of them is—the perverse ingrates!" Terry growled, but his face looked pleased. "They could have returned to us, but they didn't . . . Well, we all love freedom, so I suppose that any inspirational thing of legend has to be free."

Again I felt chilly, yet pleasantly haunted. How many charming myths have been pursued, during the course of history? The Grail of the Knights. The Fairy Morgana. The Fountain of Youth. And now something else that we remembered as real.

Our watch continued there beside the Atlantic, which often is magnificent enough to thrill even a professional spaceman. Winter ended and Spring began; still there were no new signs of those we sought.

But in mid-May events took some fresh turns. The first of these was sour. While we wandered along the shore, we saw a hulking figure scanning the rocks, some hundreds of yards

farther along the water's edge.

I nodded toward the man and remarked, "So we've got company, once more. Brunder has been drawn back here, too."

He waved at us mockingly, and then moved off at his leisure in the opposite direction.

The next incident was much more of a romantic order. Terry and I were on that rough beach again, early one morning. We must have known every pebble and shell for miles each way, by now. But suddenly there was a glint at our feet; in the sunrise it shone yellow and metallic. I was sure that it hadn't been there the evening before.

Terry picked it up, and held it in his hand. It was a tiny golden brooch with antique griffons on it, eroded by the sea. There was no doubt that the thing was centuries old.

Terry looked speculative, and something greedy and ancient ached in my nerves. "Once there were pirates," Terry said. "Is that the answer for this—or part of it?"

Neither of us craved Brunder's company, just then. But suddenly there he was, smirking at us.

"I've got as much right to be here as anybody, Durbin," he pointed out to me. "You found

something, you two, didn't you?"

"What's it to you if we did, Brunder?" I snapped at him.

"Nothin'," he replied with forced mildness and a shrug. "Except that so did I find something."

He opened his paw, and a compelling curiosity made me look inside it. He had a tiny lump of yellow metal, which showed signs of having been stamped with a numeral or something once, though this was too worn to decipher, now.

"It's heavy, Durbin," Brunder said. "I went down there by those rocks, and there it was."

Terry and I were stuck with a swapping of courtesies, so to speak. So Terry opened his palm, too.

Brunder looked. Then he looked at me. "Gold ain't worth what it used to be in the old days, Durbin," he said. "There are too many sources of it now, in space. But it's still worth quite a bit. And there are other more valuable things on the sea floor. I wonder if you are thinking of the same thing that I am, Durbin? That if a man had a small friend with special skills . . . Well, skip it, Durbin. See you around . . . Come on, Toby . . ."

Yes—there on a rock was that big tomcat of Brunder's,

glaring expectantly at the water, his tail lashing. Brunder had to call again to make him come away.

Now, and for weeks to come, Terry and Alice and I practically lived on the beach, for we had seen what might be a further sign. Terry blew on his mouth organ intermittently, hour after hour. Alice threw bits of bread on the ocean—it was something that Marty and Martia had liked. But the crying seagulls grabbed most of it. And the pair from Mars who had left us made no attempt to see their old friends.

But every morning, when we pulled ourselves out of our sleeping bags on the shore—every morning for ten days—we always found something that hadn't been on the beach the night previous. Always the objects were in the same little, less rocky stretch of shore, fifty yards long—as if to make them easier to find.

Twice we found two medium-sized pearls. Once it was the link of a golden chain, and a cut ruby. Several mornings yielded a pair of golden coins, too worn to identify. Delivery was usually in pairs. It got so that, whenever we didn't find two of something, we figured that Brunder must have found its

other, companion piece.

One dawn, we thought we heard the xylophone. Later, in the sunshine, we were sure we glimpsed a flash of green and gold, thirty yards out from the rocks.

"Something really ought to happen soon," Alice said that day. "I wouldn't be surprised if they were back with us by tomorrow. And have you two decided yet whence came all the things of treasure—and how?"

She was kidding. The answer was more or less obvious, wasn't it? I thought of two small beings from Mars, lugging gifts up from the undersea in their flippers.

"Marty and Martia were with us long enough to begin to understand humans," I chuckled. "Maybe they feel obligated to us. Or maybe these presents are peace offerings for their running away. Or perhaps tribute is being paid to Earthly music and friends."

To myself I thought of the ocean—little known to me beyond looking at its surface, except from pictures: The sunlight turning violet deep down, and then fading to blackness more awesome than that of space. Submerged mountains and unexplored valleys. Hidden wealth. The skeletons of ships. Beautiful gardens of anemones.

Weird, fantastic world. The monsters of the deeps. Could Marty and Martia go even there—letting the fluids of their flesh become gradually compressed, until it thus assumed an internal counterpressure to hold back the terrible weight of the ocean above, and keep them from being crushed? Perhaps they could. For it was said that even warm-blooded whales, accustomed to the surface, could dive hundreds of fathoms' deep. And, to defend themselves against enemies, our Martian pair and their probable offspring had their stings and their intelligence.

Alice's optimism about a possible reunion the next day, proved less than groundless. For, for the first time in many mornings, we found nothing of value on the shore. Week followed week, and it was the same. There were no more gifts, and no more indications of any kind that the creatures Terry and I had found on the Red Planet were still somewhere off the coast.

July passed, and half of August. In spite of the gifts from the sea—of limited value—our funds were getting low. I felt that we had about reached the end of a phase, for good. And we used to think that we'd get rich! Oh, sure! I was aware of

a lot of time wasted, instead. Yet I felt sad in another way, too.

Terry and Alice also looked sad. But now they received some offers to play for people, again. Terry did have a lot of talent; Marty and Martia had given him something completely new, and he had developed it, adding elements of his own.

As for me, I'm an active sort. I couldn't just hang around forever. For one thing, space was beckoning me back to it. So I said, "Well, kids—when do we break this up?"

"Soon, I guess, Dad," Alice answered. "It has been a whole year. But we'll always have to check back here now and then."

"Yeah, honey," I agreed.

Perhaps it was queer, but Brunder was still around. But Marty and Martia had been the big thing in his life, too; so he was just as persistent as we were. Maybe he thought that something might still break, and give him what is supposed to be at the end of the rainbow. He was living up in the village, somewhere. I kept glimpsing him, with that cat of his, along the shore. And quite often I saw Toby roaming by himself. He knew Terry and me, and he'd come to the house, and Alice would give him a bandout.

So Toby became the key to a

vital point. You know the affinity that cats and dogs have for smelly objects. I saw Toby one morning at the back of our garden by the brook. He had something in his mouth. It consisted of two long ropy ends, connected by a slender cord. Yeah—nameless refuse, you'd say it was.

But something about it—I didn't know what—aroused my interest. So I approached Toby, and he growled a warning.

"Steady, Tomcat," I said. "Do you expect to chew through whatever that is? It looks pretty tough."

He growled again, and made his fur, marked like a tiger's, bristle. But now I got a better look at what he had. The two clublike ends of the object seemed to be composed of a mixture of clay and fibre, cemented together. It could be brook-clay, and the cellulose from aquatic plants.

After that, my blood began to pound, and I was in no mood to let Toby argue with me. "Thanks, Tomcat," I said. "Remind me to give you a whole steak sometime. But—come on, now—I want *that*!"

I got a clawed hand out of the deal; Toby got a swat on his ear, for which I should apologize.

I felt of the two tapered objects—joined together like two old friends who didn't want to lose each other. Then I hollered:

"Terry! Alice! Come here quick! . . ."

We put what Toby had found into a plastic tank that had been empty for a year. We poured water shallowly over it. Then we waited and drank pots of coffee, and paced up and down and speculated.

"They must have swum up the brook from the ocean," Terry said. "After that, scrambling overland among so much unfamiliar vegetation, maybe they got lost trying to find our house. It's been hot and dry most of this summer—*really* hot for anything Martian. Besides, Marty and Martia are mainly aquatic. They can't live out of water forever, and even the brook is almost dry this far from the sea. But they had a Martian way to keep alive—no, there are certain fish in African rivers that encase themselves in mud during the season when there is almost no water . . . Anyway—dammit—I hope that now everything is as fine as it seems! . . ."

Just about everything *was* fine. By noon that day, Marty and Martia were out of their cocoons, swimming in their

tank and trilling out our names and words that they hadn't forgotten, apparently delighted to be in our company again, after a year of complete freedom in an ocean of a strange, alien planet:

"Hhhello-o-o-o, Tttrrrreee! Aaalllizzz! Ppoppaiee-ee! . . . Thhhannkzzz! Wweee cumm baaaackkkk! . . ."

Yes—the legend had returned. I got on the phone. Minutes later the world knew about it. I guess most everyone remembers how it was. Within an hour we were swamped with newscast people, and sponsors, and representatives from every phase of the entertainment industry. Also, there were serious scientists. It looked like the bonanza once more—but bigger than ever.

But Terry didn't want to sign any contracts. I thought that he must have gained in practical worldly knowledge, and was playing hard to get—a smart thing to do, with what we had.

"Give us a couple of weeks time, to see about several matters," was what he said to the commercial and television and theatrical people.

Alice and he proceeded to teach Marty and Martia a larger vocabulary. "They're folks, as far as we are concerned," he reminded me. "They have the intelligence and feelings of folks.

And this time they must understand us and speak well enough to tell us what they want—as is their right."

While admitting some suspicions of more frustrations on the way, I found myself agreeing with all this. It couldn't be otherwise.

So at last Terry put it to them. "What'll it be, Friends?" he asked. "Do you want to go traveling and making music with us, again? Or are you homesick for the northern ice-cap of Mars, under the dark blue sky? I know that you must be as restless as your music. Or is it something else that you want? There are many possible places and situations. There is even the zoo, or the museum—though I don't think I'd recommend either . . ."

No—Marty and Martia didn't answer right away. First they touched fins there in their tank. Then they swam around each other in a kind of dance. Finally Marty put his flippers against the plastic of the tank, and words buzzed out:

"Nnottt nnowww Mmarrrrzz orrr ttrraavvellll . . . Bbbetterrr nneww thhinngzzz . . . Ttryy zzzooo . . . Ttryy mmuuzzee-ummm . . ."

"Zoo? Museum?" Terry protested. "But that'll be like prison, Marty!"

"Zzoo—Mmuuzzzeem!" Marty persisted, and Martia echoed his words.

"You don't know what you're talking about!"

I'm afraid Terry Miklas was prejudiced. He didn't want to lose Marty and Martia as his tour-partners. I don't think it was the money so much—not with him. Rather, it was like having close friends who choose a separate path, and so are partly lost.

Now Alice put in her two cents worth. "Maybe they don't know what they're talking about, Terry," she said. "Who does, when they try something new—especially so new as the ways of another planet? Marty and Martia have to find out things for themselves. So, from their viewpoint, you could be wrong."

Well, Terry Miklas had a nice mild grin, in defeat. He shrugged. "All right, Music from Polar Mars," he said. "My very best wishes, and we'll still see each other around."

Then he looked at me, and the look said something which I'd already sensed. We used to talk about selling the *Pisces Martis* to zoos or museums or big scientific organizations for a heavy price. It was still possible, as far as such institutions and so forth were concerned. Funds were no

doubt available. And I don't think that Marty and Martia would have minded being exchanged for money in the least, nor would have felt in the least enslaved, thereby. For it is known, now, that money to them is just a quaint human custom, not influencing their liberty an iota. But still we had our own ethics to follow—rigid and necessary for us. We did not sell a humanly intelligent friend as a chattel. To do so was now unthinkable. Wherever Marty and Martia went, they went by their own choice, as responsible individuals. So again, for us, the Bonanza had to slip away.

Everybody knows how it has been. Marty and Martia are in New York, now—in the Museum of Natural History. But they've been flown around to many cities. They have a big tank, now, full of Martian and Earthly aquatic plants, and a hundred gadgets for Marty to fool with and examine, and for them both to tinkle out their haunting tunes, on. Their ancestors couldn't have lived more luxuriously, even in the days of Mars' ancient glory. Scientists from everywhere keep studying them, and asking them questions. They even have books printed on waterproof parchment. It seems that their special attendant, Professor Harwind, is teaching

them to read. And so, for the time being at least, their care-free, primitive existence, colored only by music, has been tainted by civilized industriousness.

Children love them, of course, and love the eerie trills and soaring, elfin chords, as of a tiny xylophone, that often speaks with words, too. But even tough spacemen, fresh from the mines of Callisto or Ganymede, come to watch and listen and wonder. And everyone else has seen and heard—if only by television and recording. Yes, there is something gentle and fascinating about the legendary mood that is Marty and Martia—even when it is pinned down, to be easily examined.

Alice and Terry? They struck out on their own, and are already a famous musical couple in their own right—making something new and fresh and truly their own, out of the art they borrowed. Perhaps it is final satisfaction and the end of restlessness for Terry Miklas. But sometimes they go back to see Marty and Martia, and put on a joint show with them, for the kids who come to the museum.

But I remember one time—not so very long ago, it was—when I dropped in to the mu-

seum to see Marty and Martia, as I still do quite often.

They understood and spoke human language a lot better by then, being quick to learn. So I said: "Suckers. Sloths. Cooped up here. Independence sold for comfort. Shame! A legend must be free . . ."

"Ssommtime wwee ggo-o," Marty buzzed on the glass of the tank in answer. "Whennn neww thhinnggzz calll . . . Wwe arrr alllwwayzz ffrreeee . . ."

I guess Marty is right. When they want out, they'll say so. Popular opinion is on their side. And if this weren't so, they still have the cleverness to escape. To be a little like animals on display doesn't hurt their pride at all. By the way people like them and react to them, they are like prisoners who can walk through walls—if they are prisoners at all. Besides, they have plenty of time. Scientists, questioning them, have found that their life span is something more than three hundred Earth-years. So sometime they'll wander away again.

Marty said something more to me, that time: "Suckkerr! Mmenn expllrrr ddisstanttt pplannettzzz . . . Fforgggett ddeceppp oshhunn. Sstrannnge."

I took the hint. In fact the idea had been revolving in my mind for some time. First I

bought some recordings of Marty's and Martia's music, right there in the museum store. Guess who I found there? Yeah—Brunner. Oh, yes—he'd been around at the house up in Maine, after Marty and Martia got back. "Hi, Durbin," he said without rancor.

I felt lonesome. Besides, there was something in the air—like the lion lying down with the lamb, maybe. Or would you say, instead, that we were just a couple of old goats?

"I got an idea, Brunner," I said. "Maybe sometime I'll get rich after all."

"Possibly I got the same idea, Durbin," Brunner intimated. "I also bought some used deep-sea diving equipment, cheap. Now if you could scrape enough money together to buy or rent an old launch, some place . . ."

Well, in a matter of a week or so, Brunner and I were off the Maine coast together. We were a couple of grouchy old spacemen, trying a new racket that intrigued us. Toby, the tomcat, was dozing in the engine-room. We had an under-water sound-system, through which we were playing some elfin music, which originated on another planet.

I went down a rope in a deep-sea diving suit, which is a little like a space suit, but is two

hundred times as heavy. When I had been down there about an hour, I met a little green and gold critter who liked what our sound-system was playing, looked like some old friends of ours, though he wasn't full-grown, yet, and clearly wanted to be friendly.

Oh, we had to converse with him on a number of occasions, give him the legendary name of Neptune, and teach him some English words. But pretty soon he got the idea of what we wanted, and led us right to the broken strong-box of an old, sunken sailing ship. Then he found us another vessel. The take in antique jewelry and money wasn't very great, but it kept us going.

We kept working at the salvage business, with Neptune as our locator. We even conversed with him about another legend—the one about Lost Atlantis—but he doesn't have any information.

Finally, however, we had a heavy bathyspheric submarine built, atom-powered, for real deep-sea diving. Yeah—funny how when space travel began, people forgot about the strange rich world of the deep ocean. Because down there, with Neptune's assistance, we have tapped about the richest deposit of uranium ore that has ever been found any place . . .

SEMANTIC COURTSHIP

BY IRVING E. COX, JR.

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

There are a lot of words that sound nice, but come out to be pretty hollow noises when you analyze them. And there are others so deeply rooted in Man's self-deception that they usually can't be analyzed. Like love, or freedom. . . .

Paula Ogden dropped the writing tube and pushed the paper aside. "It's going badly today, Friend Kraela," she admitted.

"You've been concentrating too much." His fragile face-scales quivered with distress. "Take the day off, Friend Ogden."

"Oh, I don't need a rest; I'm used to hard work. It's your language that creates the problem." Paula spoke in sing-song Venusian, because it had been easier for the Earth-expedition to learn that tongue than to teach the larger number of their hosts English.

"The others make the same complaint."

"Venusian is far simpler than English," Paula said. "At least in structure. It took us less than a month to learn to use it. But it's so different!" She gestured toward the page she had been writing. The language symbol was an unbroken, graph-like line wavering between parallels ruled across the page. The upper parallel was the highest note theoretically possible in the musical speech of Venus; the bottom, the lowest. As the written line danced between the two extremes, it indicated exact variations in sound. "You speak in terms of ideas," Paula explained. "You don't have names for things and actions, the way we do."



"It would cause confusion," Kraela said. "What is the value of a naming word to a language, Friend Ogden? If you speak, you intend to convey ideas."

Paula laughed. "In theory, yes. But translation from English into Venusian can be disastrous."

"In time it will come more smoothly, I'm sure." Friend Kraela moved through the sliding door in the gold-plated inner wall. Slim, green scaled, Kraela was a man-sized lizard with a peculiarly fragile and humanly expressive face.

As the Venusian departed, Curt Hallen entered Paula's cubicle. She felt the familiar annoyance. She reminded herself that Hallen commanded the expedition; she was expected to respect him and she tried to. But Paula considered that Hallen had gone native, because he had been the first to take a wife from among the women of the expedition, and he always spoke Venusian, even when he was alone with the Earth-people.

In the unchanging summer heat of Venus, Commander Hallen wore only the skin-tight trousers of his nylon flight uniform. He was a large, muscular, dark-haired man, naked above the waist. He had a belt of rusting cartridges slung over his shoulder and a rusting revolver

buckled to his waist. He stood by her writing table, his legs spread wide, his jet eyes smouldering with anger.

"You've got to make up your mind, Paula," he said. "They were quarreling again this morning."

"I've given you my answer, Commander Hallen." Her voice was cold; but her blood was pounding. "I won't be tied down."

"The old standards don't apply, Paula. You have to take Collins or Jergensen. If you settle it between them, I think I can keep the other three under control."

"I don't have to do anything, Commander. I'm a free woman; I mean to keep it that way."

"Even if you split the expedition wide open?"

"Why blame me?" She stood and looked down through the transparent wall into the crowded, gold-paved square in front of the Institute Building. Hallen joined her, clenching his fists.

"There are only twelve of us, Paula."

"Twelve or twelve billion—what difference does the number make? I don't want a husband, Commander Hallen."

His hand clamped down hard on her wrist and he jerked her roughly away from the wall. "We're eight men and four

women stranded in an alien world—perhaps for the rest of our lives. Paula, you can't put it off any longer. We have to stop this childish competition for your attention."

"What the men do hardly concerns me."

"It concerns all of us! We can't survive if we're splintered into factions!"

"Give your advice to the men, then; I'll look after myself."

"I've never heard such blind, egocentric nonsense!" His hand came up and struck the side of her face. She reeled away from him, her eyes blazing with fury. Paula reached for the rusting revolver strapped to her hips; but her hand drew back when the door in the gold-plated wall slid open. Kraela stood on the threshold, his face-scales trembling.

"Friend Hallen! We've just received a report from the southern islands. Our men there believe they have located the ore-rock you need. They've sent samples; perhaps you'd like to see them?"

"Of course, Friend Kraela," Hallen replied. *Friend* was the only title of courtesy used among the Venusians. Sometimes Paula found it insipid and annoying, as she did their whole elaborate social ritual.

Paula was left alone. She stood for a long time looking down into the streets and canals of the Venusian capital. In the transparent wall, built from the hardened sap of the Venusian ivy-tree, she saw the dim reflection of her face—thin, hollow-cheeked, serious and scholarly. Her black hair was pulled into a tight bun at the back of her head; thick glasses glittered over her pale eyes.

Her body, in the frayed nylon uniform, was appealingly feminine, with the inviting curves of youth. But her face destroyed the illusion. The mouth was too large; the teeth were too prominent. And her long, blunt nose gave her a faint resemblance to a horse.

The reflection awoke bitter memories. She looked into the face of herself as a hatchet-faced schoolgirl, forever buried in a mountain of textbooks. The boys had never asked Paula for a date; and Paula revenged herself on her loneliness by winning recognition as a scholar. In college the same pattern persisted. She had deliberately and defiantly emphasized her plain appearance, flaunting it like armor.

Grimly she turned back to her writing table. She read through the idea she had been setting down when Friend Kraela had first interrupted her.

"Beyond the Endless and Eternal Mist of Venus is a condition of no-air, no-heat, no-cold, a great emptiness in which an infinite number of light-sources and living-globes—"

It was crudely expressed. Paula wondered if the idea symbols which she had used were accurate. Was "light-source" a correct referent for a star? Or "living-globe" a proper generalization for all the numberless satellite planets? The translation of the science she knew into Venusian ideas exposed a host of terms which Paula had always used as if the name-words were, in fact, the things-named. It had been a subtle psychological shock for her to discover the extent of her verbal dependence.

She doggedly blotted out the half-sentence and began again.

For six months the twelve survivors of the stranded Earth-expedition had been housed by the Venusians in the sprawling Institute Building, the center of Venusian science. The Earth-people had occupied the time sampling the Venusian accumulation of scientific knowledge, and trying to explain their own. It was a fair exchange in theory, but difficult to implement, for the cultures were as alien as the reptilian evolution of Venus was different from the anthropoid

human descent. The only common meeting ground was an equivalent concept of rationality.

The door in the golden wall slid open and Thor Jergensen came into Paula's cubicle. Like Commander Hallen, he was naked except for nylon flight trousers. He was a huge man; a tangled mass of yellow hair curled above his round, earnest, undistinguished face; his arms bulged with a farmer's muscles.

"Have you heard the news, Paula?"

"What news? I've been working here all morning, Thor."

"The Venusians have found an ore with traces of silver in it!"

"Traces!" she repeated with disgust. "We've had false alarms before."

"I suppose you're right," he admitted. "We may never find enough metal to make an alloy of gold. We're stuck on Venus until the Earth sends out another expedition." He paused, licking his lips. "Then we have to face the situation squarely, Paula, and make the best of it."

"I am, Thor." Casually she drew her revolver and scraped at the thick coating of rust, caressing the handle significantly. She was not sure how much longer the weapon would remain in working order. Perhaps the oxidation had already destroyed

the firing mechanism. But the revolver still represented a symbolic threat and a symbolic security.

"Paula, do you find all of us so very unattractive that—"

"I have no need for a man, Thor."

"None of us is self-sufficient; we need each other. I—I want you, Paula."

She laughed. "Because I'm the only unmarried woman on Venus?"

"Because you're a woman, Paula."

She lashed at him with scalding sarcasm. "Your proposal, Thor, simply vibrates with romance! You sweep me off my feet!"

"Under other conditions, I might try, Paula; this is too important for that. The words we would use on Earth have other connotations; I'm trying to say exactly what I mean. We have a duty as human beings to build a successful Earth colony on Venus and survive until—"

"I have only one duty, Thor—to myself, to my integrity as a person. I won't be shackled to any man."

"Marriage is a working-together, a mutual sharing."

"Not love, Thor?"

"What else is love, except that?"

"Oh, come now, Thor! You've

been around. Love's an illusion. Men talk of love, but after marriage the sharing is all one-sided. They don't care what a woman knows, what her mind is like—"

"That sometimes happens on the Earth, Paula; it couldn't happen here."

"Men want their women to be pretty and empty-headed. They surround us with machines that do all our work, and give us nothing to occupy our leisure time. They're jealous if we try to use our abilities."

"Possibly, Paula; in some cases. But no one can make a general statement about the behavior of a sex." He paused, waiting for her reply. When she said nothing, he continued emotionlessly, "Hallen asked me to call you, Paula. The others are leaving for the southern islands immediately, so we can make the first survey of the diggings before nightfall."

Paula closed her writing table and walked toward the door. Jergensen slipped his arm awkwardly through hers. "Will you ride with me, Paula?"

"I'll ride where I like, Thor. I'm free; I've told you that; no man can claim me."

Twelve Earth-people and eight Venusians gathered by the parking lagoon behind the In-

stitute Building. They were indiscriminately divided among the three official Governing Council gliders which stood in the gold-paved landing trough. As always, there was a jockeying among the five unmarried men for the privilege of traveling with Paula.

Paula had never become used to it. She always said—with considerable vehemence—that their unending argument disgusted her. Yet, in an indefinable way, she enjoyed it; she liked being the focal point for so much attention. She would not examine her mind for logical reasons that would explain such opposing reactions; she was vaguely afraid to pry too closely for the truth.

At first the competition had been phrased in terms of general good humor. But the expedition had been stranded on Venus for half a year and the gentility had slowly vanished as the men faced the fact that escape was improbable. The shuttle rocket was gone. The only abundant metal on Venus was pure gold. Unless the expedition could find a sufficient quantity of another metal to make a gold alloy strong enough to withstand the strain of flight, they could not build another rocket.

There were five unmarried

men, but only two, Thor Jergensen and Dale Collins, offered any serious competition for Paula's affection. Thor Jergensen approached her with reason and self-restraint. She considered him a bungler, crude and inept. Dale Collins appealed to her with a supreme ego-confidence in his own youth and virility. It both excited Paula and frightened her. At first he had said:

"You'll have me, Paula, when you've given yourself time to look over the field."

But recently his phrasing had changed:

"I'm going to take you, Paula; understand that. I've waited just about long enough."

"You consider your feelings, Dale," Paula had reminded him once. "But what about mine?"

He had thrown back his head and roared with laughter. "You get a man out of the deal. You've no right to ask for anything else."

Paula and Thor Jergensen left the Institute Building together. Dale Collins joined them and tried to insinuate himself between them. Jergensen deftly side-stepped the maneuver. Despite his size, his movements were smooth and quick; he was as graceful on his feet as a prize fighter.

Collins smiled faintly and slipped Paula's free arm over

his. He was a smaller man than Jergensen, thin, lithe and suave. His dark hair was plastered close to his skull. The sharp angles of his face were emphasized by a pointed beard. All the men had grown beards since the expedition had been wrecked, for the cutting edges of scissors and razors had long since rusted into blunt uselessness.

"I've saved a place for you in our glider," Collins said to Paula.

She answered him as she had Jergensen, "Where I ride, Dale, is one thing I'll decide for myself."

"Sure, Paula—so long as you go with me."

"I'm neither your slave nor your wife, Dale. I'm a free—"

"You will be."

"—a free agent, free to think and act as I please."

He laughed and locked his arm hard over hers. She tried to pull away. Thor Jergensen swung past them, barring their way, his hand resting on his revolver.

"She said she'd make up her own mind, Dale."

Collins eyed his opponent in enigmatic silence. His fingers strayed toward the holster strapped to his hips. Jergensen quietly drew his gun and held it leveled at Collins' chest. Slowly Collins relaxed.

"You make an impressive display of romantic nobility," he said to Jergensen.

"Paula has a right to make her own choice."

"Only a civilized society can afford the luxury of female rights, Thor. We've slipped back to the day of the caveman. A smart man catches on to that pretty fast; a fool keeps up the pretenses of chivalry. Paula will understand the truth one of these days." He turned toward her with a mocking bow. "And when you do, my dear, I'll be waiting for you. The trappings of sentiment, you'll find, are a poor substitute for a man."

He pulled her suddenly into his arms, grinding his lips savagely against hers. The fire of the kiss left her weak, trembling with fury and excitement.

Ironically, the brief quarrel determined Paula's place in the gliders for her. The others were already aboard the boats. Only three empty spaces remained. Paula rode to the southern islands with Collins on one side of her and Jergensen on the other.

During the trip the Earth-people lay flat on the slick decks, clinging to the improvised safety ropes which the Venusians had installed for them. The lizard-men of Venus stood in the

sterns, riding the boats like aquaplanes.

The gliders were the chief form of transportation used on Venus. Made from chip-like sections cut out of the giant ivy-trees, the boats were driven forward by large, web-footed reptiles; the Venusian horse, which bore a faint resemblance to an enormous, green scaled duck. As soon as the gliders were in the open water beyond the crowded city canals, the animals were whipped up to a speed of more than ninety miles an hour.

A warm, misty spray splashed into Paula's face, drenching her uniform. When she raised her head, she could see the perpetually cloud-filled sky of Venus reflected in the quiet mass of sea water. Occasionally they passed suburban islands. Paula saw villages and cities and scattered homes, gleaming yellowly in the gray light. The most widely used building material on Venus was gold, held in place by a sturdy structural skeleton made from the hardened sap of the ivy-tree.

They reached the southern islands late in the afternoon. The gliders slid to a stop in gold-lined landing troughs and the reptiles were turned to graze in pasture lagoons. While there was still light, Commander Hal-

len took the men to inspect the shallow diggings.

If the deposit appeared to be large, the Earth-people would have to build their own mine and carry on the mining operation without Venusian help, for the lizard-men had phenomenally weak forearms. Their six-fingered hands were capable of the most delicate kinds of fragile line-work, but they had no strength to hold or use heavy tools.

While the men inspected the ore, the women built cooking fires and prepared a typical Venusian meal of boiled fish and water-grown salad greens. Except for the barest exchange of necessary talk, the other three women avoided Paula. She had come to expect such isolation. She had been used to it before she came to Venus and, in a way, she was proud of it. She was not like other women, she told herself; she had never moved with the herd. Neither fashion nor fad had ever aroused her interest. What good would it have done? Nothing she did would improve her appearance.

Paula built her fire and relaxed against a moss-covered boulder while the water in the gold pots came to a boil. Friend Kraela brought her a basket of fish, cut and ready for cooking. He sat beside her, curling his

thick tail beneath his legs and caressing the pet snake coiled around his arm.

"If this deposit of ore is large enough," he asked, "how long will it be before you can build another sky ship?"

"I don't know, Friend Kraela; we'll have to make a gold alloy, so we'll have a metal strong enough for a shuttle rocket. Then we'll have to cast and build the engines and the rocket tubes. Why do you ask? Are you so anxious to be rid of us?"

"By no means, Friend Ogden! You came as our guests; you have become our friends. You have brought us your science of machines and metals; you have taught us about the unknown universe that lies beyond our Endless and Eternal Mists."

"And you have given us your knowledge of living things," she said, "which is far superior to ours."

"Mutual growth is a fair exchange; how else would different cultures of rational men meet?"

"It's sometimes very different on the Earth."

"So you have shown us in your history of your people. It seems inexplicable! Tell me, Friend Ogden, if you build your sky ship and leave us, will you ever return?"

"Some of my people will. They want to colonize your planet."

"And we have the room. This contact which we have established must not be lost!" He arose and glanced at the cooking pot. Satisfied that the water was ready, he dropped the chunks of fish into it, sprinkling them with a handful of dried herbs. When he turned toward Paula again, his face-scales shook with suppressed emotion.

"Does it mean a great deal to you, Friend Ogden, to go back to your own world?"

"I make a poor colonist."

"Suppose—" He hesitated, in distress. "Suppose the ore isn't what you need; suppose we can't—"

"Then we'll keep on searching. Friend Kraela, we must find it, somewhere!"

"It matters so much?"

"To me, yes. The others could make out, I think. But I don't belong here, Friend Kraela! I was assigned to the expedition because I'm a scientist, not because I would marry one of the men!"

"The customs of your people are different, but isn't it a natural thing for any species—"

"No, Friend Kraela; no!" Paula got up and began to pace the damp ground beside the fire. It was the first time she had seriously considered the possi-

bility that they might never escape from Venus. Eventually another Earth-expedition would come gliding out of the clouds, but that would be years in the future—perhaps generations. Paula's security was built upon her recognition as a scientist; in her own terms, she could compete and maintain her status. But here that counted less than the fact that she was a woman. The old pain swirled up to torment her mind—the memory of the ugly schoolgirl with the horse-face, of the college dances she had never attended. On the Earth men had rejected her; nothing was different now. Yet, if there were no escape, the mass pressure against her freedom would persist, a conspiracy against her security, a conspiracy to destroy her as a person.

The men returned from the diggings, walking slowly and thoughtfully. Dale Collins and Thor Jergensen dropped on the earth beside Paula's fire. She served them the flaking chunks of fish in silence. She hated even so minor an appearance of domesticity, but it was a duty she could not avoid. Commander Hallen had ordered each of the women to prepare food for two men. Paula considered it an indignity; once she had prided herself on the fact that she did not know how to cook. It was

menial work, a symbol of female servitude, a relic of primitive savagery!

Dale Collins set his bowl aside suddenly and snatched her hand, pulling her roughly to the ground beside him.

"Let me be the first to tell you," he said. "Relatively speaking, this is an enormous deposit of ore. We're going to sink a mine shaft in the morning."

"Then we—we'll get away, Dale?"

"Hallen estimates a pound of silver to the ton. It'll take us twenty years to recover enough to make our alloy."

"Oh, no!" She shrank from him, trembling; but when she looked up at Thor Jergensen, he nodded his head in confirmation.

"Twenty years," Collins repeated. "A generation, Paula. Our children ought to have enough metal to build a rocket. Our children, Paula. Yours and mine."

He pulled her close, kissing her on the lips. His body throbbed against hers. "I'm through waiting, Paula."

"No, Dale!"

She struggled to draw her revolver; she jabbed the rusting metal against his naked chest. He laughed through clenched teeth.

"I doubt that thing works any longer," he whispered. "Mine

was rusted through yesterday."

She glanced uncertainly at the gun. In the split-second that she was off guard, he slapped the weapon from her hand. She turned to run from him, but he caught her in his arms again. She fought and screamed as his hands tore at the fraying fringe of her nylon uniform.

Friend Kraela danced around them, wringing his hands in anguish. "We are civilized men!" he piped in his shrill, sing-song voice. "You are acting like forest beasts! Leave her, Friend Collins, I implore you!"

Suddenly Paula was free of the crawling hands. She fell back against the mossy boulder, sick with nausea. Dale Collins and Thor Jergensen faced each other beside the fire. In the yellow light, Paula saw the other Earth-people watching with fear and indecision.

Commander Hallen hurled orders at the two men; they ignored him, circling each other with swinging arms. In a flat, toneless voice, Jergensen whispered: "Paula said no, Collins; perhaps you didn't hear her."

"It's not the answer I want, Thor."

"She can make up her own mind—in her own time."

Collins snorted with disgust.

"Still trying to win her with gallantry?"

"If I can, yes. If not, I'll try to help us both remember that we're civilized people."

"We were, Thor; not any more. She belongs to the man who can take her."

"She belongs to herself."

Collins lunged at Jergensen. The two men locked arms, rolling on the damp ground. No holds were barred; they fought like animals. Paula watched with a strange mingling of horror and fascination. An indefinable emotion surged deep in her soul, because these men were fighting over her. For an instant the idea pleased her, and then she rejected it with revulsion. She wanted neither of them; she would never become the possession, the property, of a man—the spoils of battle!

Cautiously she moved around the fighting men and stooped to pick up her revolver. Commander Hallen pulled her to her feet. She whirled toward him in fright, cradling the gun in her hand.

"Enjoying it, Paula?"

She tried to reply, but her voice caught in her throat, trapped by a confusion of emotions.

"It's your fault," he said. "You've driven them back into savagery."

"It's their fault, Commander! Can't they simply leave me alone?"

"You've no right to ask that here, Paula. You're no longer Miss Paula Ogden, the eminent scientist. You're simply a woman—the last female either of these men will ever be able to possess."

"I won't be possessed! I'm free, Commander Hallen!"

"Not any more, Paula. I can't allow you to drive us at each other's throats. I'm settling this tonight. Whichever man wins."

"No!" she screamed. "I won't let you give me away like a lottery prize!"

"You had your chance to choose for yourself; you've lost it."

The sound of conflict stopped. Dale Collins lay motionless on the ground. Thor Jergensen got up slowly and staggered toward them. His body was streaked with blood and grime. His face was swollen with bruises.

"She's yours, Thor," Curt Hallen declared quietly. "You've won her by—"

"No!" Paula screamed again. "I won't take any man!"

Jergensen stopped in front of her.

"I fought for your privilege of saying that," he told her. His breath came in short, heavy gasps; it was edged with irony

as he added, "I decline the prize, Commander. I want a woman, not a neurotic egoist, a woman to share the pleasures and hardships of—"

"Share?" Paula repeated. "No man knows the meaning of the word!"

"You're under the impression that you're an adult, Paula, but you think with the feelings of a bad-mannered adolescent. If you can grow up, I want you for my wife, a sharing partner to bear my children, to help me build our kind of world here. Dale needs you for himself, because you're female and he's male. He sees neither your soul nor your mind. That's an egoism to match yours, Paula. Let him—"

Suddenly the inert Collins sprang to his feet and leaped at Jergensen. The brutal fighting began again.

"You could have prevented it!" Hallen said to Paula. "Do you intend to keep on talking—making excuses—until you drive them to murder?"

"Please," she whispered. All the ice was gone from her voice. She began to cry, and she hated herself for it. Tears she considered the worst kind of female weakness. "Don't you understand, Commander? I'm free; I'm independent. I can't give up myself, my individuality—"

"Perhaps you should try to understand," he countered. "Your independence is a sham. This time you'll take one of them, Paula; there'll be no more bargaining and no more talk." He moved toward the fighting men to pull them apart. Paula glanced at the others, but they ignored the appeal in her eyes.

A hard core of determination solidified in her mind. They intended to force her to marry, because somehow they thought it would help them all to survive, preserve the security of the group. Paula's security as a person meant as much to her. She could sacrifice the group in order to save that, just as willingly as they would sacrifice her. She could look out for herself; she had no need for them.

She took her revolver and fled. She heard running footsteps behind her, and a babble of voices, but she maintained her distance. Her breath was nearly spent when she found a crevice among the rocks, protected like a natural fortress by an overhanging cliff. They could only approach her one at a time, through a narrow defile. She heard their voices again and she called out calmly:

"Stay where you are. I'll shoot the first man I see."

"Paula!" It was Curt Hallen's voice. "Don't act the child."

"Leave me alone, Commander. I won't come back. I won't—"

"And don't fire your gun. It's too badly damaged by rust. It might backfire and kill you."

"I'll take that chance."

There was a long silence before Hallen called out again.

"You're a fool, Paula; we can't desert you here."

"I can take care of myself; I always have."

Thor Jergensen added his plea:

"The fighting's finished, Paula; I've won. Come back with us. In your own time you can decide which of us—"

"No, thanks, Thor. Forget about me. Let me go my own way."

"We can't, Paula. Our group's too small. To lose you is to lose a part of our own identity; can't you see that?"

Another silence. Then Hallen shouted, "Will you let Friend Kraela come up there and talk to you, Paula?"

"A peace ambassador? Of course, Commander. It won't do you any good, but perhaps he can satisfy you that I mean what I say."

She had no fear of the Venusian. The lizard-men, with their abnormally weak forearms, were a defenseless people; they had never engaged in conflict among

themselves. In any case, Paula was armed.

Kraela slid into her hiding place, curling his tail around his legs as he crouched against the damp rocks.

"I want an explanation," he said in singing Venusian. "Your people have talked to me, but they do not make the situation clear. Perhaps you can. Why did you run away?"

"I will not be forced into mating," she answered in Venusian.

"Force is always wrong, but why do you run from mating? Is it not a custom among your people for a mutual mate-choice to be made?"

"I don't want a mate, Friend Kraela."

"But how else do you complete your life?"

"By giving to my whole society of my ability and talent, in my own way—"

"Giving and sharing: with us those are essential parts of mating."

"I will not belong to a man!"

"He would belong as much to you."

"I'm a—a person alone, by myself." It was an awkward translation of "independence" but it was the best Paula could do.

"Mating does not change that condition, Friend Ogden."

"Let me say it differently: I

do all things for myself; I think alone; I rely upon no other person for help or support."

Kraela made the trilling Venusian laugh. "But how can that be? No one is alone; we must rely upon each other. Consider how we have helped you Earth-people here; or consider how you have shared with us your scientific knowledge. Could you have survived on Venus without us? Could you survive without each other?"

She felt annoyed and vaguely frightened. "You speak of groups, Friend Kraela. I meant only myself, as a single person."

"But each of us is a part of a group; how can it be otherwise?"

The nebulous fear rose up in a strangling cloud; she felt cornered and trapped, and the only way out was to explain herself to him. If she could make him understand, she felt that she could justify herself to herself. And she knew she must justify her behavior; the integration of her life depended upon Kraela's understanding. "I take care of my own thinking. I'm a—a—"

She stopped. There was no direct way to translate "free woman" into the Venusian language. In rising panic she ransacked her mind for substitute expressions. How could she turn the phrase which seemed so

solidly meaningful in English into the idea-symbols of Venus? In her mind she came up against an enormous blankness, a void cluttered with words but empty of ideas. Somehow her bitter childhood frustrations were released again, and she said desperately.

"I am not pretty, Friend Kraela; no man wants me."

"Surely your people do not select mates on the basis of anything so superficial?"

"They do, Friend Kraela! You don't know—"

"Yet tonight, two of your males have fought over you."

"Only because I am a woman."

"Is there any other reason why they should quarrel?"

"I've made my life without men! I don't want it any other way! I'm a—" There it was again, that phrase, "a free woman." Her panic turned into terror. Her mind dissolved into chaos.

She could answer Thor, turn aside his quiet pleading, because she spoke to him in English. Her own language had made it possible for her to confuse word-symbols with ideas. But by questioning her, by driving her into a semantic corner, Kraela had forced her to admit her own lack of idea-referents. She could not phrase her argument in Venusian, because the argument

was a structure of symbols which had no specific meaning. Paula's comfortably secure universe fell apart.

The rising tide of dissolution pushed her close to the fringe of insanity, but the memory of a quiet voice held back the flood. "I want you for my wife, a sharing partner to bear my children, to help me build our kind of world here."

Paula staggered weakly against the rocks. She tried to smile, but her eyes swam with tears. Blindly she reached out and took Kraela's arm.

"You did a nice job, playing John Alden," she whispered.

"Alden? I do not know the name."

"But you understand the idea. You knew exactly what you were doing when you came up to talk to me."

They moved out of her hiding place.

"You'll return to them, now, Friend Ogden?"

"Yes. I want to tell Thor Jergensen that I've grown up." She clung to Kraela's clammy hand. "At least I think I have, with your help. If Thor still wants to marry me—"

"On your strange terms, Friend Ogden?"

"No. On our terms—his and mine together."

THE NEST

BY POUL ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATED BY EBEL



With the Nest and the Rover, Duke Hugo was well set for his business—which was loot! But he hadn't counted on a mad Cro-Magnon and a maddened dinosaur, by name of Iggy!

I'd been out hunting all day, in the reeds and thickets and tall grass of the bottomlands down by the Styx, and luck had been bad. The heat and mug-

giness bothered me worse than it should have, after all these years in the Nest, and the flies were a small hell, and there was no game to speak of. We'd



killed it all off, I suppose. Once I did spot the sabertooth which had been hanging around the cattle pens, and shot at him, but he got away. While chasing him, I went head over heels into a mudhole and lost my powder-horn and two good flints, besides ruining my shirt. So I came back toward evening in a devil of a temper, which is probably what started the trouble.

There was a sort of quiet golden light all over the world as I rode homeward, filling the air and the wide grasslands and the forest. Pretty. But I was thinking bitterly about the cave and The Men and a wet cold wind blowing off the glaciers of home and roaring in the pines. I wondered why the hell I hadn't had the brains to stay where I was well off. You got rich, working out of the Nest, if you lived, but was it worth the trouble?

Iggy's feet scrunched on gravel as we came onto the road. A lot of the boys have kidded me about riding a dinosaur, when a horse is so much faster and smarter. But what the hell, a young iguanodon goes quickly enough for me, and the flies don't bother him. And if the need arises, he's like a small tank—as I was very shortly going to learn.

I plodded along, swaying in the saddle, ten feet up in the

air on Iggy's shoulders. The fields stretched around me now, hundreds of acres of wheat and rye and maize, with the orchards dark against the yellowing sky. The slaves were still at work, cultivating, and a couple of overseers waved to me from their horses. But I was feeling too grouchy to reply; I sat hunched over pitying myself.

A screen of trees and hedges marked off the fields; beyond, the road went through gardens that blazed with color, all around the Nest. Roses and poppies like fresh blood, white and tiger-tawny lilies, royally purple violets—sure, Duke Hugo was a free-wheeling buzzard, but he did know flowers. Ahead of me, I could see the peaked roofs of the houses, the slave pens beyond them, and the castle black over all. I thought of a hot shower and clicked my tongue at Iggy, to make him step faster.

That was where the fight began.

The girl burst out of a clump of cherry trees in blossom, screaming as she saw me. It was a small dry scream, as if she'd already burned out her throat. I only had time to see that she was young and dark and pretty, then she swerved around to dodge me. Her foot slipped and she went down in

a heap. I don't know exactly why I grabbed my ax and jumped to the ground. Maybe the long red weals across her naked back had something to do with it.

She tried to scramble up, I put my foot on her back and held her down. As she looked up, I saw big dark eyes, a small curved nose, a wide full mouth, and a hell of a big bruise on one cheek. "What's the hurry, sis?" I asked.

She cried something, I didn't know the language but there was a terrible begging in her voice. A runaway slave—well, let her run. The sabertooth would be better for her than her owner, judging by those marks. I lifted my foot and bent over and helped the girl rise.

Too late. The man came out through the trees after her. He was a young fellow, short but strongly built, and mad as a Zulu. He wore a gray uniform, a square helmet, and a swastika armband—a Nazi, then—but his only weapons were a broadsword and the long whip in one hand.

The girl screamed once more and took off again. He snarled, and snapped the whip. It was a murderous Boer sjambok; its heavy length coiled around her ankles and she stumbled and fell.

I suppose it was my bad luck

that day which flared up in me. I had no business interfering, but I didn't like Nazis much. I put a hand on his chest and shoved. Down he went.

He scrambled up, bellowing in excellent Norman French. I hefted my ax. "Not so fast, chum," I answered.

"Get out of the way!" He lunged past me toward the girl, who was lying there crying, out of hope, out of tears. I got him by the collar and spun him around, flat on his back.

"I rank thee, friend, in spite of that fancy uniform," I told him. "I rate a flintlock, and thou'st only got that pigsticker. Now behave thyself!"

Sure, I was looking for a fight. It's the best way there is to work off your temper.

"*Thou bloody swine—*" He got up again, slowly, and his face was strange. It was a look I'd only seen before on children and kings, just about to throw a tantrum. I didn't recognize him, never having had much truck with the Nazis or their friends. Suddenly he lashed out with the whip. It caught me across the chest like a white-hot wire.

That did it. No damned swordsman was going to hit me that way. I didn't even stop to think before my ax bounced off

his helmet.

The clang sent him lurching back, but the steel held firm. He screamed, then, and drew his sword and sprang for me. I met the whistling blow in midair. Sparks showered, and our weapons were nearly torn loose.

He growled and tried to thrust, but a broadsword is no good for that. I knocked the blade aside, and my ax whirled down. He was fast, jumped back. I furrowed his shoulder.

"The devil damn thee!" He got two hands on his sword and it flamed against my bare head. I caught the blow on my ax handle, swept it aside, and took one step inward. A sidewise chop, and his head was rolling in the gravel.

Most people think a battle-ax is a clumsy weapon. It isn't. I'll take it for close quarters over any weapon except a .45 or a carbine, which I didn't rate. His pretty sword went spinning as he fell, flashing the sunlight into my eyes like a last thrust.

Breathing hard, I looked around me. I was a little surprised that the girl was still crouched there, but maybe she was too tired and scared to run any more. She was a stranger to me, and I'd have noticed anyone that nice-looking, so I decided she must have been cap-

tured just lately. She'd been horribly treated.

"Who art thou, sis?" I asked, trying to be gentle. I asked it in French, English, Latin, Greek, and whatever other languages I had a smattering of—even tried the language of The Men, just for the hell of it. Her eyes were wide and blank, without understanding.

"Well—" I scratched my head, not knowing exactly what to do next. It was decided for me. I heard a barking curse and the sound of hoofs, and looked up to see a dozen Huns charging.

I've no particular race prejudices, not like some of The Men. I'm about a quarter Neanderthal myself, and proud of it—that's where I get my red hair and strong back. We'll say nothing about the brains. Otherwise, of course, I'm a Man. But where it comes to Huns, well. I just don't like the greasy little devils. That was beside the point right now, though. They were after my skull. I didn't know what business of theirs the fight was, and didn't stop to think why. No time. Not even time to get mad again. The lead man's lance was almost in my throat.

I skipped aside, chopping low, at the horse's forelegs. The poor beast screamed as it fell. The

Hun sprang lightly free, but I'd sheared his arm off before he hit the ground. The next one had his sword out, hewing at me. I turned the blow and chopped at his waist, but he was wearing chain mail. He grunted and swung once more, raking my cheek. Then they were all about me, cutting loose.

I scrambled toward Iggy, where the big stupid brute stood calmly watching. The Huns yammered and crowded their ponies in close. Reaching up in an overhand sweep, I split one brown monkey-face. A sword from behind struck at my neck. I ducked as it whistled over me, and thought in a queer short flash that this was the end of Trebuen.

"Chinga los heréticos!"

The tall horse had come thundering from the Nest and hit the pack like a cyclone. Don Miguel Pedro Estebán Francisco de Otrillo y Gutierrez flashed like a sun in his armor. His lance had already spitted one Hun and his sword sent another toppling. Now he reared the Arab back, and the slamming forefeet made a third man's pony yell and buck. The Huns howled and turned to meet him, giving me a chance to cross steel with one at a time.

Slash and bang! We were

fighting merrily when a shot cracked in the air, and another and another. That was the signal of the bosses. We broke off and drew away from each other, still growling. There were five dead on the road, too trampled to be recognized. I drew air into lungs that seemed on fire and looked up to the new rider. She'd come galloping from the Nest, not even stopping to saddle her horse.

"Ah, Señorita Olga!" Don Miguel rose in his stirrups and swept her a bow till the plumes on his helmet brushed his horse's mane. He was always polite to women, even to Captain Olga Borisovna Rakitin, who by his lights was not only a heretic but unmaidenly.

I sort of agreed with him there. She was a big woman, as big as most men, and beautifully formed. The tight gray-green uniform of the Martian Soviet left no doubt of that. Under the peaked, red-starred cap, her face was straight, finely cut, with high cheekbones and big gray eyes, and it was a sin the way she cropped her bronze-colored hair. But she was a human icicle; or maybe a chilled-steel punching ram would be better.

She holstered her pistol with a clank and looked us over with eyes like the wind off a glacier.

"What is the meaning of this brawl?" She had a nice low voice, but spoke French like a clicking trigger.

Don Miguel's bearded hawk face broke into the famous smile that had made him the terror of husbands and fathers from Lagash to London. "Señorita," he said gently, "when I see my good friend Trebuen set on by pagans and in danger of death before his conversion to the true faith is completed, there is only one thing which any hidalgo can do. Surely a lady will understand."

"And why did ye fight?" she went on, looking at me and the Huns.

One of the horsemen pointed to the battered Nazi body. None of them spoke French very well, so they wouldn't talk it at all if they could help it. It was plain I'd killed a particular pal of theirs. Well, any friend of the Huns is an enemy of mine.

"And thou, Trebuen?" she asked. "I've had about enough of thy Stone Age cannibalism. Thou'rt the worst troublemaker in the Nest."

That wasn't true, and she knew it. The Huns and the Nazis were forever brawling, and the Normans were even worse—though as they owned the place, I suppose they had the right. And I resented her

crack about my people. The Men aren't cannibals, they're peaceful hunters, minding their own business. I'd never heard about war before being recruited into the Nest. That was when I chanced to meet a mammoth-hunting party, guided them, and had one of the Duke's sons take a fancy to me. They could always use tall husky men here.

"I didn't like his face," I snapped. "So I took it off."

"This girl—" She looked at the plump, dark little chick, who had huddled up close to me.

"My property."

"I didn't know even thou went in for slave-beating," she sneered.

"I didn't do that!" I shouted.

Don Miguel had noticed the girl by now. He beamed at her, because she was certainly a knockout. Then he swept off his cloak and threw it over her shoulders. She drew it close around her and gave him a funny look, like a kicked dog that somebody finally pets. One small hand stole toward mine, and I took it.

By this time the cops had arrived, twenty of them marching in double-time from the Nest. The setting sun glared off their helmets, armor, and shields. They broke formation at their leader's command—he was a centurion, I noticed—and closed

in around us, their short swords bare and sharp-looking.

"There've been enough brawls here," said Captain Olga. "This calls for an inquiry. Maybe a hanging or two."

"Señorita," said Don Miguel, very, very softly, his black eyes narrowed on her, "the law of the Nest permits gentlemen to duel. Any subsequent quarrel is between the victor and the dead man's friends."

"We'll see what the Duke has to say about it!" she snapped, and wheeled her horse around.

"Come on, friend," said the centurion. "Up to the castle."

I shifted my ax. "Are we under arrest?" I asked, putting a bite in the words. Cops have to be kept in their place.

"Er—not exactly, I guess," said the centurion. "But you'd better stay inside the castle walls till the Duke settles your case."

I shrugged. Killing a man here wasn't a crime—there were plenty more where they came from. I might have to pay a fine, and perhaps some weregild to a few Huns and Nazis. That griped me, but I could afford it.

That's what I thought—then.

I clicked my tongue at Iggy, who stooped over so I could scramble aboard. I took the girl in front of me, which made the ride a pleasant one. She was

horribly scared, and clung close to me. Iggy rose back up on his hind legs and stalked alongside Don Miguel's horse. The Huns trotted sulkily in the rear, twittering in their own language. The cops enclosed all of us and marched steadily down the road. They weren't really Romans, most of them were barbaric riffraff from Germany and Thrace, but their discipline was beautiful.

Don Miguel looked up at me. "Who is the young woman?" he asked. "Where is she from?"

"I don't know," I said. "Looks Semitic, but that could mean almost anything."

"Well," he said, "we'll take her to the Wisdom and find out."

"Uh—" I stumbled awkwardly. "I don't know how to thank thee for—"

"*De nada, amigo.*" He waved a long, lily-white hand. "It was a pleasure. Quite apart from the fact that I have to save thy heathenish soul before thou departest this world, unworthy apostle though I am, there is this question: Where else in the Nest would I find a man who could keep up with me in a drinking bout?"

"Well, there is that," I agreed.

We entered on the Via Appia. There was pavement within the bounds of the Nest, beautifully

laid—but a lot can be done when you have all the slave labor you want. Small houses lay on either side of the broad street, surrounded by gardens and bowers—the homes of the ordinary warriors. Slaves and naked children stopped to gape at us as we went by. We saw a few friends in the streets or in front of their homes: Thorkel the Berserk, all tricked out in Italian silks; the Mongol Belgutai, swapping small talk with Amir Hassan of Baghdad; the old sea dog Sir Henry Martingale, smoking in his garden while his concubines fanned him and played music. They hailed us cheerfully, not knowing what we had coming to us. But then, neither did we.

The cops' footfalls slammed on the pavement, a dull drum-beat between the fantastic houses. There were about a thousand homes in the Nest, each built according to the owner's fancy. A half-timbered Tudor cottage nestled between a French château and a swoop-roofed Chinese affair with one of their silly-looking dragons out in front; across from it were a miniature Moorish palace and one of those adobe huts the Greeks insisted on kenneling in. We turned at the fountain in the Place d'Étoile—a lovely piece of Renaissance work,

though it had gotten somewhat knocked up en route to us—and crossed London Bridge to the Street of St. Mark. The town muezzin was calling Moslems to prayer as we climbed the hill on which the castle stood.

Its gray stone battlements threw a night-like shadow over us. Looking around, I could see the slave pens on the other side of town; overseers were herding the field workers back, and such of the city's slaves as worked by day were trotting obediently toward the same place. Not many ever tried to get away—there was no place to go, and if a sabertooth or nimravus didn't get you first, the Normans would hunt you down with dogs. They thought that was rare sport.

We went through the gate into the flagged courtyard, past the guards—those were specially trusted Janissaries, armed with repeater rifles. "Get on down," said the centurion. "I'll take your mounts to the stables."

"Okay," I said, "but if they don't give Iggy enough to drink there, thou'lt hear from me. He needs lots of water."

We stood in the courtyard. A couple of big mastiffs growled at us. There was a small group of Normans breaking up an outdoor poker game as it got too dark to see—some of the Duke's

many sons and grandsons. They swaggered past us into the main keep. Most of them were dressed in Renaissance style, though one wore a Chinese mandarin's robe. Some, the older ones, carried pistols as well as swords.

"I suppose we wait here till the Duke summons us. I hope it won't be long—I'm hungry." Don Miguel spoke to the Nubian porter: "If we are called for, we will be in the Wisdom's chamber, or else in the main gaming room."

The girl shuddered as we walked into the keep. Don Miguel laid a brotherly arm not quite about her waist. "There, there," he said. "We shall find out who thou art, and then we will get thee some wine and dress those hurts."

"How about the rest of her?" I asked.

"Oh, there is no hurry about that," he answered.

I felt a tingle of jealousy. Just lately, I'd lost my concubine in a crap game to Ethelwulf the Saxon—I'm not a harem keeper, I believe in one at a time—and had been thinking that this wench would make a nice replacement when she was patched up. But if a man's saved your life—oh, well. She kept looking in my direction anyway.

We went down long, stony

corridors, hung with rich tapestries; the electric lights didn't drive away the gloom and chill, somehow. Now and then we'd pass a slave or a warrior, but no one paid any attention to us, in spite of the fact that I was only wearing breeks and that Don Miguel and I were both spattered with red. You got used to almost anything in the Nest.

"I thought the Duke was away this afternoon?" I said.

"He is. Off to survey the Danelaw. I fear me the poor English will be missing more than the vikings ever took."

"Well," I said, "it's about time for another expedition anyway. The boys are getting restless." As a warrior third class—technically a musketeer—I had my own responsibilities and command. "And there ought to be good pickings in Saxon England; the Romano-Britons certainly had some fine things."

Don Miguel shrugged delicately. "I wish, my friend, thou wouldst not be quite so blunt about it," he said. "At any rate, Duke Hugo and his party should be back in time for dinner. They took the Rover out this morning."

The Normans were often pretty stupid. They could have brought the Rover back within a second of its leaving the Nest,

no matter how long they stayed in the Danelaw, but no, they were too superstitious for that, they had to be gone all day. In fact, they'd never done any of the things they could have done with the machine, except just transport themselves and us. Oh, well, it was theirs.

We came to the fork in the hall. One branch of it went off toward the eating and gaming rooms, another to the guarded door beyond which was the Rover's place. We took the third branch, toward the harem. That was guarded too, of course, by slaves whose size and strength hadn't been hurt much by Hugo's following the quaint custom of his father, Duke Roger of Sicily; but we didn't go that far. The girl shuddered and moaned as we started up a long stair, into the north tower.

A fancy bronze door at its top opened into the Wisdom's laboratory. I slammed the rather gruesome knocker down, and pretty soon his dusty voice said to come in.

The lab was a huge room, most of it filled with bookshelves; an arched doorway led into a still bigger library. One end of the lab, though, was given over to grimoires, wands, skulls, a stuffed crocodile, bottles and flasks, an alembic, a spectroscope, and an induction furnace, for

the Wisdom dabbled in alchemy. He came toward us, his long black robe sweeping the ground, his hairless head bent forward as he peered near-sightedly at us. "Ah," he murmured. "The Cro-Magnon and the hidalgo. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

I never knew just where the Wisdom came from. Some said he was Victorian English, some said he was Reformation German, but my private guess is Byzantine Greek. He was here because of his impossibly good memory and scholar's brain. I don't think there ever was a book he couldn't translate or a language he couldn't soon learn, and if you gave him time and references, he'd tell you what you wanted to know about any sector. It saved a lot of first-hand casing of many joints. Then he was our interpreter and teacher of new arrivals. I didn't like him—nobody did—nasty cold-blooded snake—but we could hardly do without that big head of his.

"We got into a fight about this girl," I said. "Where's she from and so on?"

He blinked at her, touched her with long skinny fingers, tilted her head this way and that. She moaned again and shrank close to me. Finally he began to talk to her, trying

this language and that. At one, she brightened a little, under the dirt and tears, and began to jabber back.

He nodded, rubbing his hands together with a dry scaly sound. "The daughter of a Babylonian merchant," he said. "Seventeen years old, carefully brought up. Some of our men snatched her during Assurbanipal's sack and brought her here. She resisted the attentions of the 'one in gray' as she calls him—a Nazi?—broke out of his house, and ran in terror. Then you rescued her. That is all."

"The poor child," said Don Miguel. There was a world of pity on his face. "I fear I shall burn in hell a long time for belonging to the Nest."

"What's her name?" I inquired.

"Oh—that." The Wisdom asked her. "Inini. Is that important?"

"Yes," said Don Miguel stiffly. "She is a human soul, not an animal."

"There is a difference?" The Wisdom shrugged. "Was there anything else?"

"No," I said. "No, I guess not. Thanks. Let's go get some chow."

Don Miguel was still biting his lip. He got those guilty spells now and then, though why he should blame himself, I don't know. He'd been in

trouble with the Governor of México when he was located by one of our recruiters, and it was as much as his handsome head was worth to go home.

Now I don't mind a good healthy fight at all. When we took Knossos—yes, we were the ones who did that—or helped in any of several times from Brennus to Charles V, or worked in a hundred other wars, it was good honest battle and we earned our loot. You could say that when we lifted that Prussian city just ahead of the Soviet soldiers, we deserved its loot more than they. And my year of hijacking in Prohibition America—the only time I was ever allowed to carry a real fire-arm—was just clean fun. But in nearly ten years of the Nest, and the Rover, I'd seen a lot of other things that turned my guts. Like this.

"Come on, Inini," I said. "Thou'rt among friends now." She managed a small trembling smile.

We were going out when the door opened before us. Captain Olga Rakitin stood there. Her gun came out as she saw us. "There ye are," she said, slowly. Her lips were drawn back, and her face was very white.

"Uh-huh," I answered. "What of it? Been looking for us?"

"Yes. Drop that ax! Drop it or I'll shoot!" Her voice rose high.

"What the holy hell—"

"Thou knowest who thou killed, Trebuen?" she asked shrilly.

"Some damn Nazi," I answered. My spine prickled, looking down the barrel of that gun. It threw explosive shells.

"No. Not a Nazi. Just a young fellow who admired them, liked to strut around in their costume. He didn't rate a gun yet, but his birth—Trebuen, that was Reginald du Arronde! A grandson of the Duke!"

There was a long thundering silence. Then Inini shrank back with a little scream, not knowing what went on but seeing death here. "*Nombre de Dios!*" muttered Don Miguel. "Judas priest!" I said..

It felt like a blow in the belly. Duke Hugo had some first-class torturers.

Olga's voice was still wobbly. I'd never heard it that way before. "Come on," she said. "The others will find out any moment. Thou mightest as well come quietly with me."

I shook myself. My hands were cold and numb, and I had trouble talking. "No," I said. "Nothing doing, iceberg." I took a step toward her.

"Back!" she screamed. "Back or I'll shoot!"

"Go ahead," I answered. "Think I want to be boiled alongside my own stuffed skin?"

I took another step toward her, very slow and easy. The gun shook. "*Gospody!*" she yelled. "I will shoot, me *Hercule!*"

I sprang then, hitting her low. The gun went off like thunder and tore a hole in the ceiling. We fell with a crash. She hit me with her free hand, cursing in Russian. I wrenched the gun loose. She tried to knee me as I scrambled away. I got up and stood over her. She glared at me through tangled ruddy hair and spat like a wildcat.

Don Miguel had his sword out, the point just touching the Wisdom's throat. "Make one sound, *señor*," he purred, "and I trust you will be able to find a suitable guide into the lower regions."

The gun felt odd in my hand, lighter than the American rods. Those Martians built them good, though. I went to the door and peered out. A sound of voices came from below.

"They heard," I grunted. "Coming up the stairs. Gives merry hell now."

"Bar the door," snapped Don Miguel. He pricked the Wisdom's neck a little harder. "Dog of a

heathen, I want rope. Swiftly!"

There was a tramping and clanking outside. The knocker banged, and fists thumped on the door. "Go away," quavered the Wisdom at Don Miguel's sharp insistence. "I am working. There is nothing here."

"Open up!" roared a voice. "We seek Trebuen and de Otrillo for the Duke's justice!"

The Wisdom was pulling lengths of cord from a chest and knotting them together. From the edge of an eye, I saw Inini creep timidly forth and test the knots. Smart girl. She didn't know the score, but she knew we had to take it on the lani quick.

"Open, I say!" bellowed the man outside. Other voices clamored behind him. "Open or we break in!"

I took my ax up in one hand, held the pistol in the other, and stood waiting. The door shook. I heard the hinge-rivets pulling loose. "Hurry that rope up, hidalgo," I said.

"It's not long enough yet—a frightful jump down to the courtyard— More rope, thou devil, or I'll see thy liver!"

The door buckled.

There was a green-gray blur beside me. Olga's fist came down on my arm. I'd forgotten her! She yanked the gun from me and jumped back, gasping.

I whirled to face her, and looked down its barrel. Inini screamed. Don Miguel ripped out a cuss-word that would cost him another year in Purgatory.

I looked at Olga. She was crouched, shaking, a blindness in her eyes. My brain felt cold and clear. I remembered something that had just happened, when I took the gun from her.

"Okay, iceberg, you win," I said. "I hope you enjoy watching us fry. That's your style, isn't it?" I said it in French, and used *vous* though we'd been *tu* before like the other warriors.

The door crashed down. A tall Norman burst in, with a tommy gun in his hands and hell in his face. I saw spears and swords behind him.

Olga gave a queer, strangled little noise and shot the Norman in the belly.

He pitched over, his gun clattering at my feet. No time to pick it up. I jumped across his body and split the skull of the Papuan behind him. As he fell, I smashed down the sword of a Tartar. A Goth stabbed at my back. I brought the ax around backhanded, catching him with the spike.

"Get out!" yelled Olga. "Get out! I'll hold them!" She fired into the mass of the men. I sent another head jumping free,

whirled the ax around, and hit a *Pickelhaube*. My blade glanced off, but bit into the Uhlan's shoulder. A Vandal hollered and swung at me. I caught his blade in the notch I have in my haft, twisted it out of his hands, and cut him down.

They backed away then, snarling at us. There'd be men with guns any second. "Go, Trebuen," cried Don Miguel. "Get free!"

No time to argue with his Spanish pride. I had to be first, because only Olga and I really knew how to leap, and she had the gun. The rope was dangling out the window, knotted to a gargoyle. I took it in my hand and slid into the big darkness below. It scorched my palm.

When its end slipped away, I fell free, not knowing how far. I dropped the ax straight down, relaxed cat-fashion, and hit the stone flags hard enough to knock the wind out of me. About fifteen feet of drop. Staggering up, I yelled to the lighted window.

A dark shape showed against the tower wall—I could barely see it. Inini fell into my arms. *Real smart girl*—she'd snatched up that tommy gun. But it smashed across my mouth.

Olga came down under her own power. We both caught Don Miguel. Ever catch a man in helmet and corselet? I growled and fumbled around for my ax

while Olga shot at the figures peering out the window.

"This way," I said. "To the stables."

We ran around the high keep, toward the rear. The yard wasn't lit, it was all shadows under the stars. But a party of cops was coming around the other side of the donjon. I grabbed the tommy gun from Inini and gave them a burst. Just like hijacking days. A couple of javelins whizzed wickedly near me, then the cops retreated.

To the stables! Their long forms were like hills of night. I opened the door and went in. A slave groom whimpered and shrank into the straw. "Hold the door, Olga," I said.

"*Da, kommissar.*" Was it a chuckle in her voice? No time for laughter. I switched on the lights and went down the rows of stalls. The place smelled nice and clean, hay and horses.

But it was good old Iggy and his rank alligator stink I was after. I found him at the end of the stalls, next to the Duke's armored jeep and his one tank. I wished we could take a machine, but the Duke had the keys. Anyway, a dinosaur can go where a tank can't. I thumped Iggy on his stupid snout till he bent over and I got the special saddle on his back.

Olga's gun was barking at the entrance. I heard other shots, rifles. When they brought up the big .50-caliber machine-guns, that was the end of us. Don Miguel had saddled his Arab by the time I was done.

His face was pretty grim. "I fear we are surrounded," he said. "Can we break through?"

"We can try," I said. "Olga and I will lead on Iggy. You take Inini." I wished he could use the tommy gun—it was easy enough, but his stallion would bolt. The brute's eyes were already rolling. Praise be, dinosaurs are too dumb to know fear.

I led Iggy toward the door, where Olga was firing through the crack. "Hop 'on, icicle," I said.

Her face was a dim shadow and a few soft highlights as she turned to me. "What will we do?" she whispered. "What will we do but die?"

"I don't know. Let's find out." I scrambled into the saddle while she slammed and bolted the door. She jumped up in front of me; the seat was big enough for that, and we crouched there waiting.

The door shook and cracked and went down. "Whoop!" I yelled. "Giddap, boy!"

Iggy straightened, almost taking my head off as he went

through the door. Olga had holstered her pistol and grabbed the tommy gun. She sprayed the mob before us. Iggy plowed right through them, trampling any that didn't get out of the way in time. Spears and swords and arrows bit at him, but he didn't mind, and his tall form shielded us.

Across the courtyard! Iggy broke into an earthshaking run as I spurred him with the ax spike. Don Miguel's horse galloped beside us. The moon was just starting to rise, shadows and white light weird between the high walls. A machine-gun opened up, hunting for us with fingers of fire.

They were closing the portcullis as we reached the main gate. Don Miguel darted ahead, the iron teeth clashing behind him. "Hang on!" I yelled. "Hang on! Go it, Iggy!"

The dinosaur grunted as he hit the barrier. The shock damn near threw me loose. I jammed my feet into the stirrups and clutched Olga to me. A ragged piece of iron furrowed my scalp. Then the portcullis tore loose and Iggy walked over it and on down the Street of St. Mark.

"This way!" cried Don Miguel, wheeling about. "Out of the Nest!"

We shook the ground on our way. Turning at Zulu House—

Lobengula's exiled warriors still preferred barracks—we came out on Broadway and went down it to the Street of the Fishing Cat. Across Moloch Plaza, through an alley where Iggy scraped the walls, through an orchard that scattered like matchwood, and then we were out and away.

The Oligocene night was warm around us. A wet wind blew from across the great river, smell of reeds and muck and green water, the strong wild perfume of flowers that died with the glaciers. The low moon was orange-colored, huge on the rim of the world. I heard a *nimravus* screeching out in the dark, and the grunt and splash of some big mammal. Grass whispered around our mounts' legs. Looking behind me, I saw the castle all one blaze of light. It was the only building with electricity—the rest of them huddled in darkness, showing red and yellow fire-gleams. But there were torches bobbing in the streets.

Don Miguel edged closer to me. His face was a blur under the moonlit shimmer of his helmet. "Where do we go now, Trebuen?" he asked.

We had gotten away. Somehow, in some crazy fashion, we'd cut our way out. But be-

fore long, the Normans would be after us with dogs. They could trail us anywhere.

Swim the river—with the kind of fish they had there? I'd sooner take a few more Normans to hell with me.

"I think—" Olga's voice was as cool as it had always been. "I think they will not start hunting us before dawn. We are too dangerous in the dark. Perhaps we can put a good distance between in the meantime."

"Not too good," I answered. "The horse is carrying double, and Iggy just won't go very far; he'll lie down and go on strike after a few more miles. But yeah, I do think we have a breather. Let's rest."

We got off, tethered our mounts to a clump of trees, and sat down. The grass was cool and damp, and the earth smelled rich. Inini crept into my arms like a frightened little kid, and I held her close without thinking much about it. Mostly, I was drawing air into my lungs, looking at the stars and the rising moon, and thinking that life was pretty good. I'd be sorry to leave it.

Don Miguel spoke out of the shadow that was his face. "Señorita Olga," he said, "we owe our lives to thy kindness. Thou hast a Christian soul."

"*Tchort!*" She spoke coldly. I

sat watching the moonlight shimmer on her hair. "I've had enough of the Nest, that's all."

I smiled to myself, just a little. I knew better, though maybe she didn't herself.

"How long hast thou been with us, iceberg?" I asked. "Five years, isn't it? Why didst thou enlist?"

She shrugged. "I was in trouble," she said. "I spoke my mind too freely. The Martian government resented it. I stole a spaceship and got to Earth, where I was not especially welcome either. While I was dodging Martian agents, I met one of Hugo's recruiters. What else could I do but join? I didn't like the 22nd Century much anyway."

I could understand that. And it wasn't strange she'd been picked up, out of all the reaches of time. Recruiters visited places where there were pirates and warriors, or else where there was an underworld. Olga would naturally have had something to do with the latter, she'd have had no choice with Soviet assassins after her. And she'd be wanted here for her technical knowledge, which was scarce in the Nest.

"Has the Duke or his men ever explored beyond thy century?" asked Don Miguel idly. A proper caballero wouldn't be thinking

of his own coming death, he'd hold polite chitchat going till the end.

"No, I think not," she answered. "They would be afraid that the true owners of the Rover would detect them. It is in the anarchic periods where they can operate safely."

I wondered, not for the first time, what those builders were like, and where they were from. It must have been a pretty gentle, guileless culture, by all accounts. Some twenty historians and sociologists, making the mistake of dropping in on the court of Duke Roger of Sicily. But even though Roger himself had been off in Italy at the time, they might have foreseen that one of his illegitimate sons, young Hugo, would suspect these strangers weren't all they seemed. Just because a man is ignorant of science, he isn't necessarily stupid, but the time travelers overlooked that—which was costly for them when Hugo and some of his bravos grabbed them, tortured the facts out of them, and knocked them off. Of course, once that had happened, anyone could have predicted that those few Normans would take the Rover and go happily off to plunder through all space—on Earth, at least—and all time—short of some era where the Builders

could find them; and that they'd slowly build up their forces by recruiting through the ages, until now—

"I wonder if the Builders ever will find us," mused Don Miguel.

"Hardly," said Olga. "Or they'd have been here before now. It seems pretty silly to hide out way back in the American Oligocene. But I must say the operations are shrewdly planned. No anachronistic weapons used, no possible historical record of our appearances—oh, yes."

"This era has a good climate, and no humans to give trouble," I said. "That's probably why Hugo picked it."

Inini murmured wearily. Her dark hair flowed softly over my arms as she stirred. Poor kid. Poor scared kid, snatched out of home and time into horror. "Look," I said, "are we just going to sit and take it? Can't we think of a way to hit back where it'll really hurt?"

It was funny how fast we'd all switched loyalties. None of us had ever much liked Duke Hugo or the company he kept, but the bandit's life had been a high and handsome one. In many ways, those had been good years. Only now— It was, somehow, more than the fact Hugo was out to fry our gizzards. That was just the little

nudge which had overturned some kind of mountain inside us.

Olga spoke like a machine. "We are three—well, four, I suppose—possessed of two working guns, a sword, an ax, a horse, and a dinosaur. Against us are a good thousand fighting men, of whom a hundred or so possess firearms. Perhaps a few of our friends might swing to our side, out of comradeship or to sack the castle, but still the odds are ridiculous." She chuckled, a low pleasant sound in the murmuring night. "And as a Martian, I am Dostoyevskian enough to enjoy the fact a trifle."

Inini whispered something and raised her face. I bent my head and brushed her lips. Poor little slave! I wished she'd been mine from the start—everything would have been so much simpler.

Slaves!

I sat bolt upright, spilling Inini to the grass. By the horns of Pan and the eye of Odin—slaves!

"Five thousand slaves!"

"Eh?" Don Miguel came over to pick up the girl. "Thou'rt most unknighly at times, *amigo* . . . There, there, my little partridge, all is well, be calm . . ."

Olga got it right away. I heard her fist slam the ground.

"By Lenin! I think thou'st got it, Trebuen!"

Five thousand slaves, mostly male, penned up in a wire stockade, not very heavily guarded—Swiftly, we settled the plan of action. I showed Inini how to operate the tommy gun; she caught on fast and laughed savagely in the dark. I hoped she wouldn't shoot the wrong people. Then we mounted and trotted back toward the Nest, changing women passengers this time.

The moon had now cleared the eastern forests and was flooding the plain. It was a white, cold, unreal light, dripping from the grass, spattering the trees, gleaming off water and Don Miguel's armor. I swore at it. Damn the moon, anyway! We needed darkness.

We swung far around the Nest, to approach it from the side of the slave pens. Luckily, there was a lot of orchard there. Trees grew fast in the Oligocene, these were tall ones. Twigs and leaves brushed my face, branches creaked and snapped as Iggy went through them, speckles of light broke the thick shadows. I halted on the edge of the shelter and looked across a hundred feet toward the pens. The castle beyond was black against the high stars, most of its lights turned off again. The

hunt for us must have died down in the hour or two we'd been gone.

The pens were a long double row of wooden barracks, fenced in with charged wire. There was a wooden guard tower, about thirty feet high, on each side, with searchlights and machine-guns on top; but there'd only be a few men on each. Olga slid off the horse—her gun would frighten it too much—but Inini stayed with me, sitting in front and cradling her weapon. Nothing moved. It was all black and white and silence there under the moon. I licked my lips; they felt like sandpaper, and my heart was thumping. Two minutes from now, we might be so much cold meat.

"Okay, Iggy." I nudged him with my heels, trying to hold my voice hard. "Let's go. *Giddap!*"

He broke into that lumbering run of his. The shock of his footfalls jarred back into me. Someone yelled, far and faint. The searchlights glared out, grabbing after me. I heard the machine-gun begin stuttering, and crouched low behind Iggy's neck. He grunted as the slugs hit him. Then he got mad.

We hit the tower full on, and I nearly pitched out of the saddle. Wood thundered and crashed around me. The machine-gunners screamed and

tried to drag their weapon over to the parapet. Iggy heaved against the walls; they buckled, and the lights went out. Then the tower caved in around us. Something hit me, stars exploded, and I hung on in a whirling darkness.

Iggy was trampling the beams underfoot. Wires snapped, and the juice in them blazed and crackled. One of the guards, still on his feet, tried to run for help. Inini cut him down.

The gun on the other side of the stockade began hammering. I shook my head, trying to clear it. "Go get 'em, Iggy! Goddam thee, go get that gunner!" He was too busy stamping on the tower we'd just demolished to notice. His breath was hissing as he wrecked it.

Olga dashed past us on foot, shooting at the other post. She was hard to see in that tricky light. The tracer bullets marked the gun for her. Bullets were sleeting around me now. A few slaves began coming out of the barracks, yelling their panic.

Iggy finally made up his stupid mind that the slugs still hitting him now and then were from the other tall shape. He turned and ran to do battle. Inini fired ahead of us as we charged. Olga had to jump to get out of the way. Iggy started pulling down the tower.

Don Miguel was shouting to the slaves as they boiled out of their houses. "Forward, comrades! On to liberty! Kill your oppressors!" They gaped at his sword. God! Wouldn't they ever catch on?

Men must be pouring from the Nest now. I kicked and cursed, trying to face my idiotic mount around to meet them. The tower began crumpling. It went down in a slow heave of timbers and splinters. Don Miguel was still haranguing the slaves. Trouble was, about the only ones who knew much Norman French had been here so long the spirit was beaten out of them. The newcomers, who might fight, didn't know what he was talking of.

A horn blew from the castle hill. Turning my face from where Iggy stood over the ruins, I saw metal flash in the moonlight. Hoofs rolled their noise through the ground. Cavalry! And if the Duke got his armored vehicles going—

Olga darted almost under Iggy's feet, to where the machine-gun lay on its splintered platform. She heaved it back into position and crouched over it. As the horsemen entered the stockade, she cut loose.

They broke, screaming. Huns and Tartars, mostly, with some mounted Normans and others.

Bullets whined from their side, badly aimed in the confusion.

I heard a slow drawl from down under me. Looking, I saw a tall man in the tattered leavings of a gray uniform. "So that's the idee," he called. "Whah, stranger, you should'a said so the fuhst time."

"Who the hell are you?" I found time to gasp in English.

"Captain Jebel Morrison, late o' the Red Horse Cavalry, Confederate States of America, at yo' suhvice. The buzzahds grabbed me an' mah boys when we was on patrol in Tennessee—All right, y'all!" He turned back to the milling, muttering slaves and shouted: "Kill the Yankees!"

There was a scattering of rebel yells, and some other men came running out toward him. They snatched swords and spears from the riders we'd cut down, let out that blood-freezing screech once more, and trotted toward the entrance of the pen.

"So 'tis smite the Papists, eh?" roared an English voice. "Truly the hand of the Lord is on us!" And a bull-necked Roundhead darted after the Southerners.

"Allah akbar!"—"Vive la republique!"—"Hola, Odin!"—"St. George for merrie England!"—"Ave, Caesar!"—The mob spirit caught them, and the

huge dark mass of men surged forth toward the Nest. About half the slaves, the rest were still afraid, and they were unarmed and unprotected—but God, how they hated!

Don Miguel galloped forth to put himself at their head. I cursed Iggy and beat him on the snout till he turned around and lumbered after them. Inini laughed shrilly and waved her tommy gun in the air. We broke out of the pen and rolled in one swarm against the enemy.

Somebody reached up to touch my leg. I saw Olga trotting beside me; she'd grabbed one of those Hunnish ponies stampeding around the pen. "I didn't know thou wert a cow-boy!" I yelled at her.

"Neither did I!" Her teeth gleamed in the moonlight as she laughed back at me. "But I'd better learn fast!" She snubbed in the pony's neck as it skittered. I suppose her interplanetary flying had trained nerve and muscle—

It must have been bare minutes from the time we first charged the stockade. Only the castle guard had been ready to fight us. But now as we entered the streets, going down long white lanes of moon between the black forms of houses, I saw the bandits rallying. Shots began to crack again. Men crumpled in

our ranks. We had to hit them before they got organized.

We went over one thin line of Romans with a rush, grabbing up their weapons. Circling the castle hill, we began mounting it on the side of the broken portcullis. Men were streaming from the houses and dashing toward our host. It was a bad light for shooting guns or arrows, but plenty bright enough for a sword.

Inini and Olga blazed at them as they came up the Street of St. Mark. No one could miss a bunch of men, and both sides were having heavy loss; but individuals, like myself, were hard to hit. I saw the attackers recoil and churn about, waiting for reinforcements. We struggled on up the hill, in the face of gunfire from the castle.

The bandits behind us were piling up now, into a solid wall of armed men across the street. I lifted my voice and bellowed: "Who wants to overthrow the castle?"

They hesitated, swaying back and forth. Suddenly a shout rose. "By Tyr! I do!" A couple of men pitched aside as Thorkel the Berserk darted toward us. Inini fired at him. I slapped her gun aside. "Not him, wench!"

Hoofs clattered on the street. I saw moonlight like water on

the lacquered leather breastplates of Belgutai's Mongol troop. *God help us now*, I thought, and then the Mongols crashed into the other bandits. Belgutai had always been a good friend of mine.

Steel hammered on steel as they fought. I knew that a lot of those wolves would switch to our side if they thought we had a fair chance of winning. Hugo had trained them to steal anything that wasn't welded down, and then stuffed his own home with loot—a mistake, that! But we had to take the castle before we could count on turncoats to help us.

We were up under the walls now, out of reach of the tower guns, but our numbers were fearfully reduced. The slaves weren't running forth so fast now, they were beginning to be afraid. I jabbed Iggy with my ax, driving him forward against the gate and its rifle-armed defenders. We hit them like a tornado, and they fled.

I was hardly in the courtyard before a new bellowing lifted. The tank was coming around the keep. It was a light one, 1918 model, but it could easily stop our whole force. For a minute, my world caved in around me.

The tank's machine-guns opened up on Iggy. He'd already

been wounded, and this must have hurt. He hissed and charged. I saw what was coming, dropped my ax, and jumped to the ground. Inini followed me. We hit the pavement and rolled over and bounced up again.

Iggy was crawling on top of the tank, trying to rip steel apart. His blood streamed over the metal, he was dying, but the poor brave brute was too dumb to know it. The tank growled, backing up. Iggy slapped his big stiff tail into the treads. The tank choked to a halt. Its cannon burped at us. The shell exploded against the gateway arch. Iggy stamped a foot down on the barrel and it twisted. Someone opened the turret and threw out a grenade. It burst against Iggy's throat. He got his taloned forepaws into the turret and began pulling things into chunks. Even a dying dinosaur is no safe playmate.

There was fighting all around the courtyard. A lot of the men with guns must have been disposed of by now. Those of the slaves who knew how to use firearms were grabbing them out of the hands of bandits who'd been mobbed, and turning them on the Normans. The rest of our boys were seizing axes, spears, swords, and chopping loose. Captain Morrison had somehow—

God knows how—managed to hold them more or less together. The Normans and their cohorts charging out of the keep joined forces and hit that little army. It became hand-to-hand, and murder.

I was only hazily aware of all that. Olga came running up to me as I got on my feet. Her pony must have been shot from under her. "What now?" she cried. "What should we do?"

"Get to the Rover," I said. "It's the only way—they're better armed than we, they'll finish us unless—"

Don Miguel was fighting a mounted knight. He cut him down and clattered over to us as we and Inini ran for the keep. "With ye, my friends," he cried gaily. I imagine this work was taking a lot of guilt off his conscience. Maybe that was one reason why some of the other bandits, down in the street, had thrown in with us.

We ran along the hallway. It was empty except for some terrified women. Around a bend of the forbidden corridor was the Rover. I skidded to a halt. Machine-gunners watched over it. "Gimme that!" I snatched the tommy gun from Inini and burst around the corner, firing. The two Mamelukes dropped.

The door was locked. I took my ax this time, and battered

at it. Wood splintered before me. I turned at Olga's yell and the bark of her gun. A party of Normans, a good dozen of them, was attacking. I saw Duke Hugo's burly white-haired form in the lead. They must have heard the racket and—

They were on us before we could use our guns to stop them. A sword whistled above my head as I ducked. I reached up and cut at the hands. As the man fell against me, screaming, I flung him into another chain-mailed figure. They went down with a clash. Two-handed, I bashed in a skull. Hugo had a revolver almost in my belly. I slewed the ax around and knocked it from him with the flat of the weapon. His sword hissed free before I could brain him. It raked me down the side as I dodged. I smashed at his unhelmeted head, but he turned the blow.

"*Harro!*" he yelled. Edged metal whined down against my haft. I twisted the ax, forcing his blade aside. My left fist jumped out into his face. He staggered back, and I killed him.

Don Miguel's horse was pulled down and slain, but he was laughing merrily around him. We cleared a space between us. Then Olga and Inini could use their guns.

I went back to the door and

smashed it in. We broke into the high chamber. The Rover lay there, a tapered hundred-foot cylinder. Inside, I knew, it was mostly empty space, with a few simple dials and studs. I'd watched it being operated.

Don Miguel grabbed my arm as I entered. "We can't leave our comrades out there, Trebuen!" he gasped. "As soon as the Normans get organized, it will be slaughter."

"I know," I said. "Come on inside, though, all of you."

When I turned a certain dial, the Rover moved. There was no sense of it within us, only a glowing light told us we were on our way through time. A thousand years in the future.

Hugo had never checked his own tomorrows, and wouldn't let anyone else do it. That was understandable, I guess, especially if you were a medieval man. I couldn't resist looking out. The chamber was still there, but it was dark and still, thick with dust, and some animal which had made its lair here scrambled away in alarm. The castle was empty. In a million years or so of rain and wind, and finally the glaciers grinding down over it, no trace would be left.

I drew a shuddering sigh into the stillness. But I knew I was

going back. We'd left a lot of friends back there in the mess of the Nest. And besides, I'd always had an idea about the Rover. Those Normans had been too superstitious to try it, but it should work. Don Miguel swore, but agreed. And Olga helped me work out the details. Then we took off.

The verniers were marked in strange numerals, but you could read them all right, once you'd figured them out. And the Rover was accurate to a second or less. We jumped back to within one second of our departure time.

The rest of the fight is blurred. I don't *want* to remember the next twenty minutes—or twenty-four hours, depending on how you look at it. We stepped out of the machine. We turned and went quickly from the chamber. As we reached its door, the machine appeared again, next to itself, and three dim figures came out. I looked away from my own face. Soon there was a mob of ourselves there.

We stuck together, running out and firing. Twenty minutes later, each time we finished, we'd dart back to the Rover, jump it into the future, and return within one second and some feet of our last departure point. There were a good three hundred of us, all brought to

the same time, approximately. And in a group like that, we had fire power. It was too much for the enemy. Screaming about witchcraft, they finally threw down their weapons and ran. I hate to think about seventy-five of myself acting as targets at the same time, though. It would only have needed one bullet.

But twenty minutes after the last trip, our messed-up time lines straightened out, and the four of us were all there—victors.

I stood on the castle walls, looking over the Nest as sunrise climbed into the sky. Places were burning here and there, and bodies were strewn across the ground. The bandits who'd fought with us or surrendered were holed up in a tower, guarding themselves against the slaves who were running wild as they celebrated their freedom. I only allowed firearms to those people I could trust, so now I was king of the Nest.

Olga came to me where I stood. The damp morning wind ruffled her hair, and her eyes were bright in spite of the weariness in us all. She'd changed her ragged uniform for a Grecian dress, and its white simplicity was beautiful on her.

We stood side by side for awhile, not speaking. Finally I shook my head. "I don't feel too

happy about this, iceberg," I said. "In its own way, the Nest was something glorious."

"Was?" she asked softly.

"Sure. We can't start it up again—at least I can't, after this night. I've seen enough bloodshed for the rest of my life. We'll have to organize things here, and return everyone to whatever time they pick; not all of them will want to go home, I suppose. I don't think I will. Life with The Men would be sort of—limited, after this."

She nodded. "I can do without my own century too," she said. "It could be fun to keep on exploring in time for awhile, till I find some era I really want to settle down in."

I looked at her, and slowly the darkness lifted from me. "Till *we* do," I said.

"We?" She frowned. "Don't

get ideas, Sir Caveman." Her lips trembled. "Thou and th-th-thy Babylonian wench!"

"Oh, Inini's a sweet kid," I grinned. "Don Miguel was giving her the old line when I saw them last, and she seemed to enjoy it. But she'd be kind of dull for me."

"Of all the insufferable, conceited—!"

"Look," I said patiently, "thou couldst easily have shot me when I first grabbed for thy gun. But underneath, thou didn't want to—be honest, now!—so thou missed. And I don't think thou changed sides a little later because of a sudden attack of conscience, any more than the rest of us, iceberg." I switched into Americanese, with Elizabethan overtones. "C'mere, youse, and let me clutch thee!"

She did.

COMING UP

Next issue brings the end of van Lihn's *POLICE YOUR PLANET*, of course—a long installment that brings all the elements to a smashing and logical conclusion, without the usual miracles that are so common in stories of revolution. But then, this is a thoroughly ridiculous type of revolution—except for the man who is caught in the middle of all the pressures. When every side seems to be in the wrong, what can a man do about finding the right side. The answer, of course, is to make one! There will also be the third and last of Irving Cox's stories about the first group on Venus. Individually, the stories are good; but as a group, they represent a good deal more than the mere sum of the parts. The usual additional line-up of top-notch novelettes and short stories will be present, of course—better than ever!

THE LEAGUE OF LEFT-HANDED MEN

BY RUSSELL BRANCH

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

Maybe the universe is inside Doctor Freeman, and the League of Left-Handed have no business on Earth. If so, it's all because a right-handed reporter answered a left-handed ad!

The ad was in my overcoat pocket—the left-hand pocket. I pulled it out with my left hand, and checked the number again. It was this gloomy old brown-stone, then, with the landscaping of weeds.

A sign on the door said "Enter," and the bare dark hall inside was already lined with waiting applicants. Some of them were obviously Skid row bums, the rest were merely "unemployed" like me. They looked at me in hostile silence and then dropped their eyes again. It was cheerful as a dentist's waiting room.

A faint murmur of conversation came from behind one of the closed doors down the hall, but I couldn't make it out. I

shoved my hands in my coat pockets and concentrated on what I had to remember. *Left hand . . . left hand . . . left hand . . .*

Then I was aware that the voices had grown louder, as if in anger, or closer, or both. The door at the end of the hallway opened suddenly.

"I'm sorry, Miss Carter. There's not a thing I can do, and I'm very busy."

The voice was as final and pleasant as a dentist's drill, but it was the girl who got my attention. My pals stared too, with appreciative leers.

She was about as big as a kitten and twice as cute. Jet-black hair under a tiny leopard-trimmed hat, and a face like a

hot-house flower. Tight-fitted leopard jacket that hugged her bust in happy amazement, and a wide-flaring skirt that flirted with a pair of lovely legs. Living proof of my theory that the best things come in the smallest packages—not to mention the most expensive.

I would have married her on the spot, but she tripped past the lot of us with a glance that was equal parts despair and scorn.

I wanted to run after her and comfort her. I wanted to take her into my arms and tell her I was no part of this gloomy old dump or this crummy crew, and that I would cherish her forever. In fact, I had already turned, but a sudden commotion snapped me out of it.

It sounded as if someone had hit the jackpot in a one-armed bandit, but what had really happened was that the man with the voice had spilled a handful of change. My pals were scrambling after it like helpful dumb bunnies—and eliminating themselves from the competition. I carefully retrieved a dime with my left hand and gave it back to him while most of them were still standing with extended right hands and sheepish expressions. There were only three of us left when he had dismissed the fakers.

We came in for a long silent scrutiny, and I returned the favor. He was about forty-five, plump and pink and tweedy, but with a pair of frosty blue eyes that matched his voice. My fellow winners were a twenty-year old delinquent who needed a haircut, and a shabby old man who needed a shave. He took the kid first, and told the old man and me to wait.

We sat down and time dragged on. The old fellow was deaf and fell asleep after we had decided it most likely was going to snow. I took another look at the ad which I had torn from the morning paper.

WANTED:

LEFT-HANDED MEN

\$25 PER DAY FOR

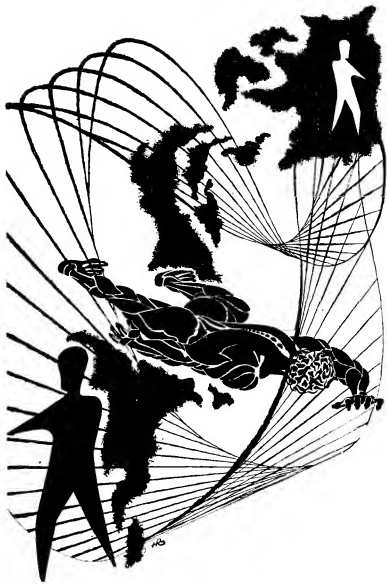
BONA FIDES

AMBIDEXTERS NEED

NOT APPLY

It told me as much it had the first time I read it, so I put it back in my left-hand pocket. I wondered what the kid was finding out, and I wondered still more when the tweedy character returned without him. The old man was next, looking a bit doubtful, and I went back to waiting. For twenty-five bucks I could sit hours on end.

Actually it was something over an hour before I finally got my chance. My employer's office was cluttered and comfortably



shabby, with a coal fire glowing in the fireplace grate. He nodded me into a leather chair and asked me some vague questions about my marital and family status. Then, before I could protest, he took both of my hands in his.

"I'd like to know a little more about this job first," I told him uneasily.

He spread out my hands and then ran his fingers over my arms. "Hmm . . . muscular development about even." He looked at me suspiciously. "How about your heart? Which side is it on?"

"The right side," I said in surprise. "I mean, the *left*."

He settled that with a stethoscope, no less. Then he stood frowning down at me. "What do you do? What's your business?"

I had a hunch, I already knew he was a crackpot, and telling him I was a newspaperman would probably queer the deal. Even an *ex*-newspaperman . . . he wouldn't believe me. So I just grinned wryly. "I'm not doing anything now. That's why I'm here. I lost my last job because I went on a bender."

My pseudo-frankness threw him off just as I hoped it would. He grunted something about whether I could stay sober for three or four days, and I said I certainly could for twenty-five

per, and that seemed to satisfy him. He went around his desk, sat down, and then deliberately shoved a glass ashtray off in my direction.

I neatly fielded it with my left hand and put it back on his desk without blinking an eye.

He leaned back and made a careful steeple with his chubby fingers. His words were careful too. "Naturally, you're curious as to what this is all about. You're a cut above my other applicants."

"Naturally," I said, ambiguously and politely.

"I'm Doctor Freeman," he said, as if that explained everything. As a matter of fact, it did mean something. A scientist . . . Professor of Physics . . . kicked out of the University several years ago under some sort of a cloud. I seemed to remember the phrase, "brilliant but unstable."

But "unstable" was the wrong word for those cold blue eyes boring into mine. They were all too stable: the fixed, fanatical eyes of a man with a Mission.

"I will tell you my theory. I hope, being one of us chosen few, that you will swear yourself to secrecy. But they wouldn't believe you anyway, in this right-handed world of theirs."

He sighed and picked up a long narrow ribbon of paper

from the top of his desk. "First, a simple little demonstration of the properties of space. This represents a plane surface." He gave the ribbon one twist and joined the ends with a paper clip. It now formed a ring, but with a twist in it like a belt you have carefully fastened.

"This is our plane surface with a turn in it—the so-called surface of Möbius. Now we will take this little paper doll, representing a two-dimensional man with only a right arm. Move him around our twisted plane—and see what happens!"

It was quite obvious what had happened. The little doll with the right arm had mysteriously acquired a left one instead. I tried it myself, with the same results. True, he ended up upside down—but still left-handed. The only way to make him right-handed again was to remove him from the surface and turn him over in space—or else send him through the twist again. I got the point even while Doctor Freeman was making it.

"That, my friend, is the result of a twisted, two-dimensional surface. Imagine a comparable twist in three-dimensions—and you'll see why I say that we left-handed beings are a world apart. *We have already gone through the Möbius twist of space!*"

"Maybe so," I said diplomat-

ically. "I can't see what difference it makes, except it's sometimes damned inconvenient."

"Inconvenient! It's a calculated conspiracy, with us the victims! Normal people fear us, knowing us instinctively as superior beings from another world. Parents and teachers plague left-handed children. Probably ninety per cent of the automobiles in the world are made for right-handed drivers. It's worth your life to sit at a crowded dinner party, or to buy a set of golf clubs or a left-handed shotgun. That isn't mere inconvenience, but deliberate persecution!"

I thought of some southpaw pitchers who had done pretty well, but for twenty-five bucks I could humor him. "Well, we've always been a minority in a right-handed world, and you know how it goes with any minority."

"Superior beings are always in the minority! Consider the motion of the universe itself—the rotation of the planets, as well as their orbits. All counter-clockwise, or left-handed! The clock itself is a prime example of right-handed hostility. They have even set up 'right' as a synonym for 'correct.' Is it any wonder I say now that we should form a left-handed league and

claim our proper place in the scheme of things?"

I answered cautiously, "That's a'l I have to do for my twenty-five bucks—join this southpaw league of yours?"

My question seemed to snap him out of some dream of his own. He nodded vaguely. "That—and act as a subject for an experiment."

"Experiment?" I looked at the paper doll who had lost an arm, and wondered what had happened to my two predecessors.

He picked up the doll and the twisted ring again. "Nothing more exciting or dangerous than moving you through a three-dimensional tunnel—like this. It shouldn't take more than fifteen minutes."

Twenty-five bucks for fifteen minutes! I stuck out my hand to seal the bargain—my left hand, and he looked very pleased.

We went out through a rear door which undoubtedly—I told myself—explained the disappearance of the other two "subjects." In fact, I asked him about them and got the casual answer: "They weren't satisfactory and I let them go. I've made some revisions for *your* experiment."

The rear yard of the old joint was almost completely taken up by a long low shed like an oversized Quonset. We stepped inside and I blinked my eyes. This

was quite different from playing with paper dolls.

The "three-dimensional tunnel" filled the shed from end to end and from ground to ceiling. It seemed to be made of ordinary three-foot galvanized drainage pipe, but so intricately whorled and looped as to defy the eye. It made me dizzy just to try to follow it, and it seemed to close back upon itself without end or beginning.

"You mean I've got to crawl through *that*?"

He removed a side section that was fitted with clamps. Inside was a slender round framework of tubing, about six feet long. It was fitted with bearings on every side and it rolled at his touch.

"You stretch out inside that. There's a compression seal fore and aft, and an air pump outside here does the pulling. When you're ready to go, you pull that little lever."

"Yeah—like a vacuum tube in a department store. But what if the seals leak? What do I use for air?"

"It takes less than a minute. Surely you can hold your breath for that long?"

"Suppose I get stuck?"

"You won't, and there's an emergency valve anyway." He was getting impatient. "It's not any worse than a roller coaster

or a loop-the-loop at an amusement park. Make up your mind."

I'd already made up my mind. For twenty-five bucks I'd ride anything going. But first I wanted the money. "In case I don't see you again," I explained with a grin—to show him I was joking.

He nodded soberly and came across. I crawled into my little horizontal bird cage, and the panel was clamped back in place. Then I was in pitch-darkness, and I could feel the heavy throb of a powerful motor. I decided right then I didn't want to go through with it after all—but my yell was only a muffled, hollow echo.

For a moment nothing happened. I knew darned well I hadn't even touched the release lever—but there was a sudden *whoosh!* and then I was spinning in chaos. Unseen forces tore at my lungs and heart. My stomach seemed to be turning itself inside out. I lost all sense of direction and entity; in fact unconsciousness came as a glad relief . . .

Then suddenly I was blinking out into a patch of light, and my scientific friend was peering in at me. He seemed very disappointed. In fact, he quickly started to close the panel again.

"Oh no, you don't!" I said, and scrambled out.

He grabbed my arm, shaking it with anger. "You lied to me! You weren't left-handed at all! You've wasted the whole experiment!"

"You lied to me too, pal—so that makes us even."

"You can't leave now! I'll have to put you through the second stage."

He tried to hold me, twisting my arm. I settled that argument with a neat left hook, and left him sitting on the floor. Because I didn't know how else to reach the street, I went back in through the house again, and a good thing it was. One of my gloves was lying on the floor in the hall, by the chair where I'd dropped it.

At least I thought it was mine, until I tried to put it on. But this seemed to be a left-hand glove—just like the one already in my pocket. However, I didn't stop to worry about it then. I shoved them both back into my coat pocket and said good-bye to Dr. Freeman forever.

Or so I thought then . . .

Twenty-five bucks would pay my rent and buy a stack of groceries. But, I told myself, man cannot live by bread alone. I called my pal Ed, who's the best cameraman in the business and knows every beautiful dame in town. He gave me her first

name and her address and a capsule description: "Tagged the most glamorous deb a few seasons ago, but her old man lost his dough and knocked himself off. She's a hard-working model now; thinks all men come equipped with long bushy tails."

I told him I could understand that if she'd met up with him, and hung up while he was telling me how much I was missed. It was nice to hear that McKenzie wanted me back, but I had more important things in mind tonight.

Vivian Carter opened her apartment door a crack, and then started to close it again. That was hopeful in itself: it showed at least she remembered my face.

"Wait!" I pleaded, and turned my back. "See—no tail."

She looked confused. "What do you want?"

"I'd like to marry you," I said, inserting my toe. "But I'll settle for dinner and a quiet talk."

She hesitated. No woman, no matter how gorgeous, is completely immune to a strange male who proposes at sight. At least that has been my experience—and besides that, Vivian Carter looked like she could use a friend.

"I'm Lin Pangborn, from the

Morning Herald. Eddie Black gave me your address."

She let me in. I restrained my natural impulses and looked around the apartment while she was closing the door. It was a nice apartment, but the view was not too hopeful. It included a photograph of a clean-cut lad and a few objects which were also indubitably male.

"Nice looking guy, but a bit young for you," I said, pointing at the photograph.

She bit her lip, and her little chin trembled. "What do you know about that Dr. Freeman?"

"Oh, that?" I wondered whether I dared to pat her shoulder. "All in a day's work. You see, he put a screwy ad in the paper for left-handed men, and—"

"I know. What did you find out?"

"Find out?" I wondered whether she'd let me comfort her, once the tears came. "Freeman's just a crackpot with some crazy theories about twisted space. Let's talk about us, which is much more interesting."

She buried her face in her hands, then, and I did what came so naturally. I sat her gently down on the couch, and sat down beside her, and forgot to take my arm away. She was so full of it she didn't even notice, but when I heard her story I began

to sit up and take notice myself.

It seemed that her kid brother had gone to answer Freeman's ad when it first appeared two days ago, and she hadn't seen him since. Freeman had denied that the kid had ever shown up, and now she didn't know where to turn.

"The police—" I began, but she shook her head.

"I went to the police, but Dr. Freeman told them the same story. He said he'd never seen my brother, and the police told me not to worry because he'd probably turn up, but it just isn't like Bob to go off without a word."

"Bob?" I asked, pointing at the photograph again. She nodded, and that much at least was off my mind.

Bob, it seemed, was a senior at the University. The ad had caught his eye both because he was a psychology major, and left-handed himself.

"I know that's where he went," she concluded. "He was completely fascinated by the ad, and he even put on some old clothes as sort of a disguise. He didn't have enough money for an impulsive trip—I know that because I'm helping him through college."

I got up and paced the floor, while Vivian watched me hopefully. Freeman had seemed

harmless and mild—at least until he had found out that I had tricked him. *But how had he known? Merely by looking at me after I had gone through his tunnel?*

My hands were back in my pocket again, and I found myself fingering that mis-matched pair of gloves. Or rather, not a pair—but two lefts! And they were both mine, because my initials were in both, although written backwards in one!

I reached for my wallet—and found myself doing it with my southside paw. My papers all looked like they'd been written in Arabic. I put the wallet back with a trembling hand and glanced at my watch. The dial was reversed, and the hands were running backward!

Vivian watched these feverish actions of mine with staring eyes. I stared back at her and remembered her words about her brother Bob being naturally left-handed. And I remembered the question I had just asked myself. *How had Freeman known, merely by looking at me? What sort of results had he expected?*

Then, inevitably, the next question occurred. What would be the results for a lad who had started out left-handed? Would it merely make him right-handed instead, or would it . . .

I stopped thinking and grabbed Vivian's hand. She came up light as a feather and under my chin, but I didn't stop then to explore the possibilities.

"Come on, honey, grab your coat! We're going to call on Dr. Freeman."

We found a taxi at the corner and hopped in the back. It was almost dark now, and I had time to wonder whether I was being completely wise. But my arm was still around Vivian's shoulder, and now if ever was the time to prove to her that I was a hero.

The cabbie crabbed my act a bit when we pulled up in front of the doctor's gloomy residence. I flourished my new twenty just to make an impression, but he handed it back to me with an indignant sneer. "What kinda funny money is that, bud?"

I looked at it in dismay. The five-spot wasn't any better—even Lincoln was facing the wrong way. Vivian paid the fare while I muttered in my beard.

Then we started up the crumbling front walk. Now was the time to stop acting the hero—but Vivian's hand was in mine and she didn't falter. "It's so nice to have a big strong man to depend upon, Mr. Pangborn."

"Call me Lin," I gulped.

"After all, we're practically married."

The front door still said "Enter," but the door was locked. The house seemed to be completely dark, and no one answered when I pounded on the door.

"Perhaps we'd better go get the police," I suggested.

But Vivian didn't think much of that idea. "We'd have to convince them first, and wait while they got a search warrant and everything else. I've got a horrible feeling that every minute counts—that something terrible has happened to Bob. Isn't there another way in?"

She was squeezing my hand and that was enough. I led her around the side, to the back door from the doctor's study, and that one yielded with a gentle shove. House-breaking was not enough, we had to enter besides.

Floors creaked and shadows moved as we tiptoed through the gloomy dump. Most of the rooms upstairs and down were devoid of even furniture, and the condition of the kitchen made it a good guess that Doctor Freeman had gone out to dinner.

Finally there remained but one locked door off the lower hall, and the laboratory shed out behind. I started out, but Vivian was nothing if not thorough.

"Why should this door be locked, if it only leads to the basement? At least I'll bet that's where it goes."

I sighed and put my shoulder to it. After all, what was one door more or less? The lock splintered out of the old frame on the second try, and then we were looking at a rough flight of stairs which unquestionably led to the dank, dark cellar.

I lit a match and started down. The match flickered out as I reached the bottom. I lit another and spotted the light bulb hanging near my head. But then I caught a glimpse of something else—and dropped the match.

Vivian heard my gasp as she edged down behind me. "What is it?"

"Nothing," I said in a strangled voice. "I just burned my finger. But don't you dare come down here! You run for the cops, and don't let anything stop you!"

She turned and ran back up the stairs without any argument, and I filed that away for future reference when I could think about such things. I waited until I heard the front door slam behind her. I waited even longer than that, shivering in the dark, and it took every last bit of will-power I had to reach

out for the bulb and pull the chain.

I'd seen a lot of messy things in my day as a reporter. I'd seen what fire could do to the human body, and head-on collisions, and chemicals and explosions. But never anything as bad as this. There was only one phrase to describe them, and that was *inside out* . . .

Six of them, lined up on rolling tables like horrible anatomical specimens from another world. All neatly tagged with dates and data—the League of Left-Handed Men! I took another long, shuddering look and discovered something which made it seem even more gruesome. Three of them were unmistakably dead, but hearts still beat on the other three!

I must have gone completely mad myself then. I found the outside cellar door, with the ramp which explained how Doctor Freeman had gotten them down here. It was padlocked from outside, but I splintered it open with a length of timber. The shed outside was also padlocked, but I forced the double doors open with the same piece of lumber used as a lever. I found the light switch, and the motor which operated the air pump, and the removable panel with the carriage inside the tunnel just as I had left it.

I did all this without conscious purpose—moving as if in some frantic nightmare. Then I went back and got the three *things* that still lived, rolling them into the shed one by one. I was sobbing to myself as I eased the first one into the round cradle, clamped shut the panel, and pulled the release.

My actions came without even thinking. All I had was a picture in my mind: a picture of a one-armed paper doll that could be reversed by moving it around a twisted surface.

The tunnel reverberated briefly with the passage of its missile, and then was silent. I cut the motor and opened the panel again with dread in my heart. A human being was in the cradle! A bleary old man who needed a shave! He blinked at me and climbed stiffly out. Then he caught sight of the other two guinea pigs—and promptly keeled over in a dead faint.

I didn't bother with him then. I was already loading another gruesome passenger. Another pull on the switch, another rumble. This one was the kid I'd seen that afternoon. He tumbled weakly out, and didn't even look around. He slumped to the floor, holding his head.

One last one to go, and a prayer was in my heart as I moved

to lift it. But even as I leaned over the table, something hit me from behind. Hands pulled me away, rained blows on me with insane fury. *Doctor Freeman had come home again!*

He fought like the madman he was, with a wildness and strength that was more than human. It was all I could do to cover myself, knowing that one more life still depended on me. I didn't even try to escape, but merely held him off and waited my chance. It finally came when he paused for breath, wide open and gasping, but still cursing me wildly. I gave it everything I had left, and he went down with a groan.

He wasn't finished yet, but he was out of the way for the time being. I lifted my last burden with my last bit of strength, and gently eased it home. Then I pulled the switch again, and turned back to attend to Freeman.

He was already on his feet and staggering toward the door. But Vivian Carter faced him there, her face white but determined, and that length of lumber raised in her hands. I shouted and ran to cut him off, and he darted aside around the dark end of the mass of the tunnel. I let him go. I reached Vivian and let her cling to me,

while sirens screamed to a halt on the street out front.

Then, while cops poured in behind I went slowly back to the panel in the tunnel and swung it aside. Bob Carter lay inside, unconscious but still breathing. Vivian rode with him to the hospital—but not before she had given me a kiss that was both a benediction and a promise.

We never did find Doctor Freeman, although he hadn't gotten out the door and there was no other way out. We found another hatch into the far side of the tunnel where he might have hidden—but we still didn't find him even after we had pulled his fiendish structure apart piece by piece.

We did find his notes in the safe in his study. Notes of his experiments and theories—notes which it required another physicist to translate. That expert followed them as far as he could, and then he gave up with a shrug.

"Gentlemen," he told the police late the next morning, "as

far as I can determine, Freeman had some theory about . . . well, you might almost call it a fifth dimension. He seemed to have some concept of putting himself 'outside'—of encompassing the whole universe, is the only way I can put it. But of course he was insane; it's obviously impossible."

And of course it was impossible, the police agreed. Those three *things* in the cellar were impossible, too, and they went to Potter's field in sealed caskets that were never opened. McKenzie said the same thing about the story I handed in, but he gave me my job back when he heard rumors that proved it wasn't my own delirium tremens.

I still wake up nights, with that horrible nightmare, but the warmth of Vivian next to me pulls me out of it. We may *all* be inside of Doctor Freeman, but as long as she's there too, everything's right . . .

Except that I'm still left-handed.

LONG LIFE TO YOU, ALBERT!

BY WILLIAM MORRISON

ILLUSTRATED BY FREAS

Albert didn't feel so good. He didn't mind the wine loaded with strychnine—it even perked up his appetite—but somehow guns gave him shooting pains. When they began waking him up, it was time to see a doctor!

The frightening words that Albert Williams uttered after those first fifteen attempts to murder him had failed have since become classic in the annals, not of crime, but of science. At the moment, however, their only effect was to give renewed hope to his wife, Loretta, who had lived through the past weeks in a sick horror that had become hysterical despair, as time went on and Albert continued to live. When she heard those words, it began to seem as if Albert might possibly be killable after all.

His wife had nothing much against him personally. Albert was not, in her estimation, a beautiful hunk of man, but then

he wasn't very repulsive, either. And he didn't have any of those obnoxious habits that some of the husbands of her acquaintance had. He didn't belch freely at the dinner table, he didn't leave rings around the bath tub, he didn't dump his ashes on the rugs. It was simply that he was in the way.

She had married him to have somebody support her, and Albert had failed her. He had a job, all right, he would always have a job, but it wasn't a good one, and it would never be a good one. He couldn't support her well enough. Albert was one of the multitude that some writers called, "Little people."



Well, he was too little for her. Especially now that she had met Bob Meredith.

Bob would marry her if Albert were out of the way, she knew he would, because she would make him do it. Bob had money to burn, and to spend recklessly on her. She didn't know exactly what business he was in, or what racket—he was evasive about it, and she didn't try too hard to find out—but it was enough to keep him going in style. And even if he left her flat after a year or two, if he went to jail, was bumped off, or just picked himself up and ran away—all of these things, she knew, being definite possibilities—well, she'd have nothing to cry about. She'd be saving the jewelry he gave her, and she'd have enough to coast on while she picked out her next man. She still had her looks, as she reassured herself by a short inspection of the mirror, and she wouldn't have too much trouble. Only, she'd have to get rid of Albert first.

Divorce? That would take too long, was too uncertain. She wanted certainty and speed.

She began with poison. Every medicine chest is full of old remedies, long discarded, and hers was no exception. One bottle, still three-quarters full, contained strychnine in small

quantities. A teaspoonful would do no damage, even a tablespoon of the stuff would cause no more than slightly inconvenient pains. A half bottle or so, however—it would do no harm to try.

But the drug was bitter, and she'd have to put in something that would disguise the taste. Wine might do the trick—and even better would be that synthetic stuff that Albert brought home from the laboratory where he worked, a mixture of alcohol, sugar, and flavoring matter that tasted horrible enough, even without benefit of added alkaloid.

She found a bottle of the concocted wine, and that evening, when Albert came home from work, she was ready.

She met him at the door and took his hat and coat. She was, to all appearances, a very affectionate wife. "Have a nice day, dear?"

Albert grunted. "Kept me rushed," he complained. "New experiment."

"What did you have to do?"

"Lots of cleanin' up."

That was the main part of Albert's job. No research man he, not even the kind of assistant called a laboratory technician. He was just a helper, one of the men who did the dirty work without having to under-

stand too well what they were doing.

"I've prepared a nice supper."

"Don't feel hungry."

"You should have something to give you an appetite. I know exactly what, Albert," she said brightly. "That wine you brought home."

Albert was not the kind of man to notice nuances in her tone. He said, "Wine's kinda weak. How about a shotta whiskey?"

"We finished that bottle of rye, and I didn't have a chance to buy another. And you don't like Scotch. No, let's have wine, Albert. Let's celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"The fact that you come home to me every night and make me so happy," she said gaily. "Now, don't say another word. Here, I've got the wine all ready."

Albert wondered gratefully what he had done to deserve so charming and loving a wife. He said, "Okay. It's better than nothin'."

They lifted their glasses. Mixed with Albert's wine was a half bottle of strychnine-containing medicine. Still gay, Loretta said, "Long life to you, Albert!" And exactly as they did in those movies about Continental high-life, they clinked glasses.

Albert swallowed his wine in

one gulp, and made a face. "Tastes awful bitter," he said.

"It'll give you an appetite," she replied pleasantly.

And in fact, it did. As the meal progressed, Albert's appetite perked up. He ate like a horse.

Loretta waited. In the morning, still kind and loving, she asked how Albert felt. He felt fine. In the evening he still felt good.

Loretta gulped, and faced the truth. The strychnine hadn't made a dent in Albert's abounding vitality. What now?

The next day, Albert worked late, and she went out for a date with Bob. There was all the difference in the world between Bob and Albert, and the difference was not, to her mind, in Albert's favor. That reminded her again of what she was missing, and now she had no qualms. There was an old can of unused rat paste she had meant to throw out, but hadn't got around to. It contained phosphorus, and the label had dire warnings of what would happen to you if you swallowed it. The fact that it fumed in the air frightened her, and at the same time gave her confidence that it would be effective.

Opportunity offered the next day, when Albert relaxed in front of the television set to

watch his favorite three hours of crime programs. When he had his eyes glued to the set, he could eat anything without noticing what it tasted like.

She spread the rat paste on a piece of thinly sliced pumpernickel, covered it with jam, and gave the delicacy to her husband.

Albert ate the whole mess without lifting his eyes from the set. At one point she was horrified to see that the piece of bread was fuming, but Albert himself noticed nothing. There happened to be a couple of shootings going on, and not even a medium-sized earthquake would have induced him to take his eyes from the screen.

Nothing happened to Albert. Absolutely nothing. Loretta shuddered. The man was incredible.

She tried once more, using the powder from a heavy dose of sleeping capsules. She put the powder in a tasty beef stew, which she spiced heavily and fed him with her usual loving care.

Albert swallowed the stew and smacked his lips over it. Once again nothing happened.

By this time, Loretta was beginning to be frantic, and the next steps she took were rather silly. One night, while he was sleeping, she covered his

face with a pillow and leaned on it heavily for ten horrible minutes. Albert offered no resistance. When she removed the pillow, he scratched his jaw, as if it itched, and turned over on the other side.

She lay awake half the night, trembling, and thinking what to do about this fool husband of hers who absolutely refused to be killed. What kind of monster was he anyway, what kind of lunatic to persist in living when any normal man would by now have died at least three deaths?

Crossing the street with him one icy day, she intentionally slipped and pushed him in front of an approaching truck. The driver braked, but the truck skidded, and Albert was thrown thirty feet. The shaken truck driver almost fainted. But Albert picked himself up unhurt, annoyed only because his suit had got dirty. His lack of concern about himself was so complete that Loretta almost fainted.

From then on, throwing caution completely to the winds, she tried everything she could think of. Pretending to be playing a game with him, she waited until Albert took a bath, and then held his head under the water as long as she could. When she let him up, he didn't even pant for breath. Apparently he liked games. He didn't notice that

her own face was white with terror.

She knocked him out of a third floor window. Albert picked himself up at the bottom, unhurt. She waited another night until he was sleeping, and hit him over the head with a rolling pin. The rolling pin broke, and she picked up a kitchen knife and plunged it at his chest. The knife turned aside and tore a hole in the blanket.

Despair clutched at Loretta's heart. What was wrong with the fool? Why was he making her bungle things?

Finally, after several more attempts, all equally futile, she decided that only one instrument of death would do the trick—a revolver.

Revolvers were not easy to buy, however. Not if you were a respectable housewife. You couldn't go shopping for them the way you could for a table and chairs. There were all sorts of questions asked, and later, when Albert was found shot, the police might want to ask her about it. She'd have to get a revolver in some way that wouldn't arouse suspicion.

Here she decided that Bob could help her. And on their next date, she broached the subject. They were in his apartment, and it was getting late when she looked at the clock.

"I hate to leave you, Bob, Honey," she said. "But I have to get home."

Bob, Honey, yawned politely. "You don't want that cluck of a husband of yours to get any ideas. Better hurry."

"Oh, he couldn't get an idea if it came up and smacked him in the face. Bob, will you take me home tonight?"

"Look, Baby, I'm dead tired. Got an important deal tomorrow. I'll call up a taxi as usual, and pay the driver to take you home."

"But what if the driver—Honey, I've been reading in the papers about taxis. Did you know that some of the drivers are crooks?"

"You're crazy, Baby."

"No, really, Hon. And there have been so many robberies in our neighborhood the last couple of weeks."

"You oughtta move out of that dump you live in."

"Do you think I don't want to? But Albert—oh, it's no use talking about him."

"Then don't."

"I don't want to, really. But about going home—Honey, could you give me a gun or something? Just in case the driver or somebody tries to hold me up? And show me how to use it?"

"A gun?" He laughed. "You lay off those things, Baby."

"Just for tonight, Honey. I'll give it back to you next time I see you."

Honey was tired, and rather than argue, he gave in. Loretta got her gun.

That same night, as soon as she got home, she put it to the sleeping Albert's head. It was an insane thing to do. It would have been impossible later to convince the police that burglars had shot him, but Loretta had reached the point where she no longer cared about such trifles. Her moments of shrewdness were reserved for wheedling her husband or lover. Otherwise, she had no thoughts to spare. Come what might, she had to get rid of Albert.

She squeezed the trigger, and there was a series of deafening explosions.

Albert sat up, looking dazed, and put his hand to his head. "Guess I musta had a nightmare," he said. And then he added the phrase, the so satisfying phrase which for the first time gave her hope. "I don't feel so good." After that he promptly fell asleep again.

Bullets had an effect on him! thought Loretta gleefully. They left him not feeling so good. She would have to get more and try again.

For the first time in years she had a feeling of affection for

Albert. Why, he really wasn't such a monster! He was going to let himself be killed after all!

The rest of that night she slept well.

Albert, apparently, didn't. In the morning he was pale and drawn, his eyes bleary. "I don't feel so good," he told her again.

"You've just been working too hard, dear. All you need is a day's rest," she said. "You just stay here, instead of going to that nasty laboratory, and I'll fix you up a nice hot toddy and make you nice and comfy. By the way, dear, what hurts you? Your head?"

"I got pains. Shootin' pains."

Her heart leaped. *Shooting* pains—the bullets had worked.

But his next words puzzled her. "All over my body. I feel funny."

"Maybe you're coming down with the flu."

Her heart did a joyful somersault. Wouldn't it be just dandy if after all those attempts of hers to kill him had failed, a tiny little germ did the trick. Flu could very easily be followed by pneumonia, and pneumonia—only they had sulfa drugs now, and penicillin, and all those other things, and some nasty old doctor might interfere with her plans. She'd have to stop him from seeing one.

But Albert had one of his rare fits of stubbornness. He didn't feel so good, and there was no use taking chances. He was gonna see a doctor, and she could like it or lump it.

Loretta decided to like it. She went with him, playing her usual role of the kindly, solicitous wife. When the doctor called him in for an examination, she even wanted to go in with him. But the old pillpusher kept her out.

Not for long, however. After a while he wanted to talk to her. "Mrs. Williams, there's something strange about your husband. He says he doesn't feel so good, and I won't wonder."

"He isn't going to die, is he, Doctor?" asked Loretta hopefully.

"No, no, don't be afraid. I mean that there have been some unusual changes taking place in his body. Have you noticed anything peculiar in his behavior lately?"

"Why, no, Doctor. He acts the way he always did." Except, she might have added, that he's developed an exasperating talent for shaking off knives, poisons, and bullets.

"You're sure he's been the same as usual?"

He continued to insist, and Loretta was annoyed. And frightened. Did he suspect? Or

worse still, had he actually found out anything?

"Albert never changes," she said. "What's the matter with him, Doctor? Is it the flu? Last night he told me, 'I don't feel so good', but outside of that, there hasn't been a thing."

"No, it isn't the flu. It's something—well, to say that it's unusual would be putting it mildly. It's unprecedented."

Loretta looked around her. On a table lay a needle with a twisted end. She realized suddenly what must have happened. The doctor had tried to give Albert an injection of some kind and hadn't been able to do it. And then he had begun to wonder and ask questions. How much had he found out?

Nothing about her, she soon reassured herself. "Where do you work, Mr. Williams?" he asked.

"I work in a laboratory."

"Oh. You do research."

"Well, kinda. I'm not in charge, but I help. They were doin' some new experiments, and I helped out."

"What kind of new experiments?"

"Can't say as I understand for certain, Doc. Kind of x-rays, or somethin'."

"I'd better find out. What's the name of your laboratory?"

Finding out seemed to take a

long time. Albert and Loretta went home, and although Albert said he felt better, Loretta made him take good care of himself. Her reckless mood had given way to extreme caution. She didn't want anything to happen to Albert now, while the doctor was so interested in every little thing about him.

To Albert she said only that there was no use in taking chances. Albert looked at her with gratitude, and wondered again what he had done to deserve so excellent a wife.

The next day he went to work, despite all she could do to stop him.

She thought over the possibility of getting more bullets, and quickly decided not to try. Not now, anyway; she mustn't do anything that might seem suspicious.

As it turned out, more doctors than one were interested in Albert. And they weren't the only people, either. Soon the entire laboratory was buzzing about him. Albert had practically to stop working, although he was still permitted to draw his wages. They put him through test after test, with results that made a growing number of people more and more excited.

Loretta began to worry. The strain of those weeks when she had made one futile attempt

after another to kill Albert had told on her. She was often conscious now of her heart, beating more violently and more rapidly than a heart should. And now that things were going on which she didn't understand, she was never free from fear. What kind of man *was* she married to?

It was not until her suspense had risen to almost unbearable heights that the doctor explained things to her.

"Mrs. Williams," he said, "your husband is unique. The only man of his kind."

"But what did he do, Doctor?"

"Nothing, apparently. It's what's been done to him that's so important."

"What somebody did to him? You don't think I—"

"Now, don't rush me, Mrs. Williams. This explanation is a little difficult, and I must make it in the proper order. To begin with, then, let me reassure you. Your husband is in good health."

"Oh, That's—that's fine."

"Not only that. He is practically invulnerable to harm by any means we know of. Drugs, weapons, bacteria, viruses, radiation—apparently he can disregard them all."

"But why?"

"That we're not quite sure of. Like several other men at the laboratory, he was exposed to radiations of an unusual kind.

However, in the other men these radiations produced no lasting changes, either good or bad. For some reason which we cannot fathom, they did produce changes in your husband. The so-called 'shooting pains' he had were due to a late stage of these changes. The cells were finally settling down in their new form. You will be happy to know that the pains are now gone. We hope they will not return."

"I don't understand, Doctor. You say nothing happened to the other men?"

"Nothing we can detect. Perhaps at a critical moment your husband ate something of a special nature. Perhaps he took some drug, or a mixture of drugs. Perhaps he drank a special mixture some bartender made. We can only speculate, and try to duplicate the results in our laboratory."

"Duplicate—you mean that you're trying to do the same thing to somebody else?"

"Of course, Mrs. Williams. If we could only get some hint of what your husband ate and drank—"

A hint? she thought. I can give you plenty of hints. Without me you'd never think of them in a thousand years. You'd never guess Albert took strychnine, would you? And bread spread with rat poison and jam

—no, you'd never guess that. So that's what did it. Those rays in the laboratory—and the stuff I gave him. I sure picked the right time to try to kill him.

The doctor was waiting as if he expected some suggestion from her. Loretta swallowed hard, and said, "He didn't eat anything different from what he usually does, Doctor. But I don't understand—why is it so important? You mean, for the Army, so soldiers won't get hurt?"

"Not only for the Army. Mrs. Williams, do you realize what your husband's body can do? Not only can it resist drugs, weapons, and micro-organisms, it can withstand long periods of deprivation of food, drink, and air. From all the evidence so far, it can also repel the onslaughts of old age. Your husband, Mrs. Williams, is the only man in the world who will never get old, never die. Your husband, my dear lady, is immortal."

And I did it, she thought in terror. I tried to kill him, and now he's never going to die. I'll never get rid of him, I'll never be able to marry Bob. I'm going to be stuck with him for life—for centuries—no, he'll live that long, but I won't. I won't live long at all. I can tell, I won't live—I don't want to live

with him, I won't live with him—

Without even a sigh, Loretta dropped to the floor. The doctor bent over her in surprise and alarm, but she was already dead.

For Albert, it was a very sad and unenjoyable funeral. He was already famous in certain scientific circles, and his fame was to grow and grow, but nothing would ever make up for the loss of Loretta. Never again, he knew, would he have a wife like her, so kind and affectionate and thoughtful, a wife who loved him so. Never again would he have a wife to whom he would owe so much.

He could not, of course, live alone. He was too used to married life for that. So he took another wife, and stuck to her faithfully, even after she became old and gray, while he retained his youth. And after her he took another and another.

He was the only immortal, and he remained so. No research scientists ever thought of strychnine and rat poison and a slice of pumpernickel as the

missing ingredients in the formula for longevity.

On his five hundredth birthday they gave him an extra special party. Everybody in the whole world who counted was there. Interplanetary statesmen and continental politicians, of course, as well as nuclear and subnuclear physicists, and astrophysicists, mathematical psychologists, and planet sculptors and threedim movie stars, and space ship designers and pilots, and a whole building full of other people whose specialties he had never even heard of.

His wife was there too—his fourteenth was it, or his fifteenth? He had trouble keeping track of them. But he had no trouble remembering Loretta. Ah, there was a wife for you. The only wife he would ever regret. And when they raised their glasses in a toast: "Long life to you, Albert!" he realized that it was she who had said it first.

Tears dimmed his eyes. "I don't feel so good," said Albert, in his immortal heart a pain equally immortal.

BOOK REVIEWS:

THE DISSECTING TABLE

by DAMON KNIGHT

When the trade publishers and other mass-media proprietors first began to admit the existence of science fiction a few years ago, some of us were ungrateful enough to count it as a doubtful blessing, and surely we had reason enough; I need only mention *The Big Eye*, *Greener Than You Think*, *Rocket Ship X-M*, and *The Thing*—from another world! It had taken magazine science fiction twenty-odd years to struggle up to its then level; it seemed reasonable to expect nothing but mediocrity from Hollywood, the slicks, radio, television and the book industry for another ten.

That time-table evidently needs revision. True, the movies are worse than ever, but along with the inevitable roaring meteorites, mad scientists and Martian princesses we've had *Destination Moon*, *When Worlds Collide*, *Five*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The slicks alone have clung almost without exception to their formula of polished vacuity, and as a result seem for the present at least to have given science fiction up as a bad job; the book publishers have not only absorbed everything the magazines had to teach in something less than three years, but appalling as it may seem, have taken an unmistakable lead.

There's a hard-cover market waiting for every first-rate science-fiction novel that appears in the magazines, and for nearly all the second- and third-raters as well, but that isn't the point; the simple fact is that the best fiction being produced in this field today is going straight into hard covers, bypassing the magazines altogether. Flexible and roomy as it appeared to us, the magazine science-fiction novel, with its taboos and above all its conventions, has grown cripplingly small.

(Convention No. 1: The hero is invariably the same idealized Average Young Man. If you go to the movies or read national advertising, you know how he looks, thinks and talks; and if your mental processes are at all like mine, you may have been getting sick of him for years without quite realizing it.)

People who can't afford to spend fifteen or twenty dollars a year on science-fiction novels will have to hope 1) that the pocket-book publishers will get around to all of these items in due time; 2) that the same practice of simultaneous paper- and hard-cover editions will at last

become as familiar here as it has been in Europe for forty years or more; 3) that the magazines will stop congratulating themselves on their maturity and resume growing up.

PLAYER PIANO, by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Scribners, 295 pp., \$3.00 • Norbert Weiner forecast the Second Industrial Revolution—the replacement of routine-skilled human labor by machines; James Burnham argued that just as the old land-owning aristocracy gave way to a mercantile elite, the merchants in turn must be replaced by a new set of rulers—the managers and engineers. Here, in the best speculative satire since *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Kurt Vonnegut has combined the two to produce an enormously plausible and vastly entertaining nightmare.

Vonnegut has carefully used no major devices that haven't already been built or that couldn't be built today; the pivot of his whole system is, as the title suggests, simply the player-piano principle adapted to industrial production.

Nobody planned it that way; it "just happened." During the war—World War III, evidently—American know-how salvaged the problem of production without manpower; and coincidentally, the nation's resources were mobilized under Dr. George Prateus, the first National Industrial, Commercial, Communications, Foodstuffs, and Resources Director. Quite naturally and obviously, the holders of this title usurped supreme power, the Presidency (as in Pohl's and Kornbluth's *Gravy Planet*) becoming vestigial, an office commonly filled by a photogenic ignoramus.

Result, a slightly uneasy paradise. On the top, the "resolutely monogamous and Eagle-Scout-like . . . engineers and managers"; under them, people who do the routine work which is still uneconomical for machines, and are repaid by the constantly expanding benefits of an expanding and mathematically efficient economy; under them, a rather perplexing mass of people with no indexed skills or aptitudes. These latter fall or are pushed into two categories: the Army, and the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps—the "Reeks and Wrecks." Nobody goes hungry, unclothed or homeless; the Army seems to fare about as badly as ever, but even the Reeks and Wrecks, judging by the example of Edgar R. B. Hagstrohm, Undercoater First Class, are provided with more and better creature comforts than the average factory worker today. The only trouble is that the machines have left very little for people to do with their time; filling in a two-foot chuckhole in a roadway appears to require the services of a forty-man R&R squad; elsewhere other scares are continually occupied in flushing out storm sewers with a hydrant . . . and from the managerial level down, this problem is becoming progressively more acute. Dr. Bud Calhoun, man-

ager of the petroleum terminal in Ilium, N. Y., puts himself (and seventy-one others) permanently out of a job in chapter 8 by inventing a gadget which does the work better.

This is the lemming-like compulsion of the American gadgeteer; Calhoun's case is typical. There's also the barber who keeps worrying that someone will invent a haircutting machine and put him out of business; he has nightmares about it; it is on his mind so much that he works the thing out himself, bit by bit, sells it for a hundred thousand dollars and royalties, and retires.

And in the Carlsbad Caverns, EPICAC, the electronic intelligence that regulates the whole shooting match, is getting bigger and bigger . . .

This is a panoramic novel. The main story line is that of Dr. Paul Proteus, son of the first National Industrial, etc., Director; but we're also introduced to the aforesaid Edgar R. B. Hagstrohm, who likes Tarzan as much as his father did and hates Chicago even more; to Pfc. Elmo C. Hacketts, Jr., who's looking forward to the end of his hitch, 23 years in the future, so that he can make an indelicate suggestion to the first officer who gives him an order; to the Shah of Bratpuhr and his sloe-eyed translator and nephew, Khashdrawr Miasma, who wander in and out of the story as unimpressed observers; and to a host of other characters, all big as life and three times as funny.

Proteus, like many a dystopian hero before him, becomes increasingly uneasy about the elite to which he belongs and eventually winds up involved in an attempt to overthrow it.

Revolution is a common theme, not to say a cliché, in stories of this type—so much so that I've often wondered when the FBI is going to get around to compiling an index of science-fiction writers. It's very nearly unavoidable, simply because it's the most dramatic sociological process, and almost the only one that happens fast enough to be compressed within reasonable limits; but until now it's always had one major drawback. The happy ending, a convention of magazine fiction, naturally demands that the revolution succeed, and solve the problem, whereas in the real world an ideological revolution has yet to achieve its stated aims.

The revolution of *Player Piano*, well organized and planned, fails: the insurgents capture (and very nearly wreck) Ilium, Salt Lake City and Oakland; but not St. Louis or Chicago or Boston or New York . . . Even if they had taken every major city in the country, it's clear that nothing would have been accomplished; in the interval between the battle and the surrender, the revolutionaries, fresh from a happy orgy of machine-smashing, find themselves tinkering with these same machines—with equal and opposite delight making them work again.

THE ROLLING STONES, by Robert A. Heinlein. Scribners, 276 pp. \$2.50 • Fifteen years or so ago, the phrase "science-fiction juvenile" automatically meant two boys and their scientist-uncle roaring off into some adventure in dimension more notable for its excitement than for its scientific accuracy. This formula is probably nearly as basic as boy-meets-girl; Robert Heinlein, who used it unblushingly in the first (and least) of his juveniles for Scribners—*Rocket Ship Galileo*—then abandoned it entirely, with magnificent results, in the next four—*Space Cadet*, *Red Planet*, *Farmer in the Sky*, and *Between Planets*—has returned to it in his sixth, with embellishments, as if to prove that it doesn't have to be bad. He makes his point; *The Rolling Stones*, if it lacks some fraction of the adult appeal its predecessors had, will probably be at least as satisfactory to the teen-agers for whom it was written.

The two boys are twins, Castor and Pollux Stone; the "uncle" of the formula is their father, Roger Stone; but the roll-call doesn't end there. Also present and very much accounted for are their mother, Edith Stone, M. D.; their grandmother, Hazel Meade Stone; their older sister Meade; and their small-fry brother Lowell. Counting the twins as a unit, and with the single exception of Meade, every one of the family is a distinct and by no means ordinary character.

This is a good place for me to eat a few words; two years ago I wrote, ". . . Most striking of all, these people are not preselected for their gigantic intelligence or their colorful personalities; they are simply a random sample of genus homo. So far as I can recall, there is not a character in any one of Heinlein's stories who is not essentially ordinary. Some of them have eccentricities . . . but . . ." This "but" is the sound of a reviewer missing the point. It's true that Heinlein's characters tend to seem commonplace by contrast, simply because they're all healthy, physically and mentally (except for an occasional psychotic villain). Heinlein isn't interested in neurotic people, perhaps because he feels they are obsolescent, like the modern automobile (disposed of with great gusto in chapter 4); but eccentricity is something else again:

"Roger, have you ever met any normal people? I never have. The so-called normal man is a figment of the imagination; every member of the human race, from Jopo the cave man right down to that final culmination of civilization, namely me, has been as eccentric as a pet coon—once you caught him with his mask off."

The speaker is Hazel Stone, an engaging oldster who is among other things a top-flight engineer and a champion chess-player; who helped to pioneer the Moon and still packs a gun, although the charge chamber is now loaded with cough drops. Her son Roger, who admits to the lowest IQ in the family, is (a) also a first-rate engineer, and (b)

a successful writer of space opera for television; the twins are mechanical geniuses, and God knows what Lowell's going to grow up to be; at four, he licks Hazel consistently at chess, and nobody is quite sure whether it's because he reads her mind or not.

In outline, this is the story of the Stone family's pleasure junket from home on the Moon to Mars, to a mining camp in the asteroids, and finally, as the book ends, to Titan. For excitement, there's a shipboard epidemic and an accident that leaves a space-scooter manned by Hazel and the baby drifting helplessly out of help's way; older readers may be more interested in the twins' remarkably complicated attempt to sell Lunar bicycles on Mars, and in Heinlein's usual detailed, plausible picture of the future, convincing even when it is most startling—as in the case of the Lunar bicycles, and in that of the notion, obvious but unheard-of, that on a low-gravity satellite like Phobos you wouldn't have to climb or jump to reach the airlock of a grounded spaceship—you could simply walk up the side of it, like a fly on a wall.

In theme, perhaps more explicitly than in any of Heinlein's previous books, this is the story that Heinlein, along with Homer, considers the greatest in the world:

"... the Stone trembled and threw herself outward bound, toward Saturn. In her train followed hundreds and thousands and hundreds of thousands of restless rolling Stones . . . to Saturn . . . to Uranus, to Pluto . . . rolling on out to the stars . . . outward bound to the ends of the Universe."

This, as I say, is the sixth of the Heinlein juveniles, and I'm still unable to make up my mind whether Clifford Geary's wildly inaccurate mechanisms and frankfurter-fingered people are an ornament to the series or not; but I have reached a decision on one other perplexing question: those jacket blurbs are written by the ghost of T. O'Connor Sloane.

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Groff Conklin. Crown, 562 pp., \$3.50 • Your attention is called to the length of this book and its price. Printing costs being what they are, the standard value nowadays runs about a penny a page or a little less; like most of the previous Crown anthologies, this one is a gigantic bargain.

I hate to include an *if*, but there is one. Unlike Conklin's earlier collections, this one is heavily loaded with material that has already appeared in hard covers. If your library doesn't already contain such items as Ray Bradbury's *Kaleidoscope*, L. Sprague de Camp's *Hyperpiloty*, David H. Keller's *The Doorbell* and—of all things—A. E. van Vogt's 35,000-word *Recruiting Station* (*Masters of Time*, Fantasy Press, 1950), then this is the obvious place to sink any seven half-dollars that

happen to be burning your pocket; otherwise, you'll probably want to think twice.

ROBOTS HAVE NO TAILS, by Lewis Padgett. Gnome, 224 pp., \$2.75, and TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND THE FAIRY CHESSMEN, by Lewis Padgett. Gnome, 254 pp., \$2.75 • Henry Kuttner, who has written science fiction not quite as long as Murray Leinster and not quite as voluminously as Edmond Hamilton, takes second place to no one in the matter of versatility. These two books, unlike as they are, cover only a fraction of his spectrum; in his time, Kuttner has done every kind of science fiction and fantasy that any editor has been willing to pay for, all the way from the involute, cerebral fiction of Campbell's decade down to a couple of bare-bosomed epics, for the early Marvel.

The accumulating mass of his pseudonyms reached the critical point in fandom sometime in the mid-forties, resulting in the so-called Kuttner syndrome; a baseless report that Jack Vance was Kuttner, originated by Bleiler and Dikty in 1950, is still being refuted at least once a month at this writing.

Robots Have No Tails, as everyone ought to know, is the saga of Galloway Gallagher, the mildly mad scientist whose inventive genius operates only when he is completely sozzled. This fact complicates Gallagher's existence almost unendurably, because he never remembers what he's been up to the morning after; and it's generally important to Gallagher's bankroll, not to mention his sanity, that he find out. In *The World Is Mine*, for example, the problem includes a series of mutually exclusive corpses of Gallagher himself, all deceased at different ages, and three little rabbit-like creatures from Mars who insist on conquering the world. In *Ex Machina* there's a three-foot pyramid with blue eyes (Kuttner, whose eyes are brown, appears to find blue ones irresistibly amusing) and a small brown animal, moving too fast to be visible to anybody but Joe the robot, who follows Gallagher around and steals his liquor before he can drink it.

All of these zany puzzles turn out to have perfectly logical, though not precisely humdrum, solutions. Every one of the five episodes in this book could have been written as a straight-faced science fiction problem story; it's our inestimable gain that Kuttner chose to use them instead as a mere framework for the uninhibited doings of Gallagher, Grandpa and Joe. The style, which is frankly borrowed, is one of the book's chief delights; if Thorne Smith had not existed, it would have been necessary for Kuttner to invent him.

Gnome, which has an irritating habit of choosing good material from the magazines and then stirring it up with its grubby little fingers, has put the first story, *Time Locker*, last. This is evidently because the

irrelevant and overcute title contains the word "Robots," and *Time Locker*, belonging to the pre-Joe period, doesn't. The excuse is inadequate.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and *The Fairy Chessmen*, two short novels from the late-forties *Astounding Science Fiction*, seem to have aged poorly; they're full of the wrong guesses which were standard in science fiction for a few years after Hiroshima—mutations, world government, status quo, underground cities, robot warfare. Even so, and in spite of strong aromas of van Vogt and Ray Cummings, these two stories are a long way from dullness. Both, curiously enough, open with the same situation: a man believes he may be going insane, but is afraid to tell anybody.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow, the second and weaker of the two—which Gnome has put first for reasons best known to itself and to God—concerns a post-World-War-II world in which an outgrowth of the UN, the Global Peace Commission, maintains an artificial status quo (a) by control of all atomic energy, and (b) by keeping a lid on all new research which might upset the balance. Joseph Breden, the protagonist, is the top nuclear physicist assigned to guard Uranium Pile One; he has a recurrent dream in which he kills his second in command and then detonates the Pile, whence his fear that he's losing his sanity. He could go to the resident psychiatrists in the Pile and be cured, but he'd also lose his job, which is vital to him in his half-aware struggle for supremacy with his mutant brother, Louis.

The dream, it turns out, is the work of a revolutionary organization which wants Breden to explode the Pile and so overthrow GPC, break the status quo. Through a mutant called The Freak, they're in touch with an alternate-probability world in which GPC failed to abort World War III, and in which as a consequence, after a good deal of necessary unpleasantness, mankind has reached a free and orderly existence, found a cure for cancer, and doubled its life-span.

The revolutionists eventually succeed in enlisting Breden, but too late—the psych board rules him unfit for duty and he's expelled from the Pile, which is finally destroyed by channeling "entropy potential" from one alternate world to another. As a final kicker, we learn that Breden's Earth isn't a future extension of ours—in his, improbably enough, Washington was destroyed during World War II by a "kami-kaze fleet." Ours, it would seem, was one of the alternate Earths which blew themselves up with uncontrolled chain reactions.

The Fairy Chessmen begins and ends with a line which is, or ought to be, as famous as "Yngvi is a louse!":

"The doorknob opened a blue eye and looked at him."

Robert Cameron, the victim in this one, is Civilian Director of Psy-

chometrics in another post-World-War-II world; in this one the third war has been started by a hastily invented and completely unconvincing imaginary nation, "the Falangists"; both sides have decentralized and sunk their vital equipment and personnel underground, and the war has resulted in a continuously expanding stalemate, with each side strenuously improving its technology in order to overthrow the other.

The Falangists now threaten to break the stalemate through the use of an equation donated by a troublemaker from the far future, one Ridgeley, who keeps popping up from time to time throughout the story. Our side has the equation, but since it uses variables that ought to be constants—e. g., the speed of light, the acceleration of gravity at the Earth's surface—it drives everybody insane who tries to solve it. Cameron is the man who has to find the man who can successfully solve the equation; and therefore the Falangists, using the equation, are continually harassing him with oddities like the doorknob: a spoon kisses him with cold metallic lips; a cigarette squirms out of his fingers and loops up his arm like an inchworm, burning his skin as it goes; invisible rain falls on him as he sits at his office desk; a clock, instead of chiming the hour, opens a sudden mouth and says, "Seven o'clock."

Partial success in solving the equation seems to be as devastating as failure; one man discovers the secret of antigravity (which involves the assumption that the Earth does not rotate); he thereupon becomes convinced that he's the corpse of Mohammed, suspended between heaven and earth—and imperturbably floats five feet above the surface of his sanatorium bed; another giggles suddenly, shrinks to microscopic dimensions and disappears through the floor, presumably on his way to the center of the planet; a third discovers the essential unreality of the entire physical world. Trying to explain this to Seth Pell, one of Cameron's assistants, he points a finger at him and says, "You don't exist!"—and Pell doesn't.

This third gentleman, having decided that he's God, and become something of a menace, is tracked down and killed by Ridgeley; meanwhile the equation is solved by a mathematician whose hobby is fairy chess—chess with variable rules. This solution has been widely criticized on the ground that all theoretical mathematics is flexible and independent of real constants; therefore on logical grounds it shouldn't have taken a man with this hobby to solve the equation, and previous contestants shouldn't have been driven insane.

The story winds up with a passage which, if it hasn't been much criticized, ought to be—Ridgeley is forced to give up the "counter-equation" by bombarding him with distortions of reality like those used to persecute Cameron, and finally by making use of an extraneous factor introduced much earlier for just this purpose—a group of non-

human entities appear to have journeyed backward through time to the era of the story, and, in dying, liberated energies which (pardon me, but this wasn't my idea) mutated a young man named Billy Van Ness in such a way that he can sense temporal extension . . . and is therefore hopelessly insane. Projecting this special awareness into Ridgeley's mind first makes him use the counter-equation in self-defense and then drives him into catatonia. All this takes place while Ridgeley struggles to reach his 'copter and escape, and is perfectly pointless; using the equation, our heroes could have destroyed the 'copter, immobilized Ridgeley, and dealt with him at their leisure—Ridgeley, in short, never had a chance.

There's an ironic postscript: Cameron, having survived the crushing weight of his responsibility in the matter of finding the man to crack the equation, realizes that his next duties—civilian indoctrination—will lead inevitably to the totally mobilized state which produced Ridgeley. He's wrong—Ridgeley's interference has given the West a breathing space by defeating the Falangists; mankind can now turn from self-destruction to conquer the stars—but Cameron doesn't realize that. He's vulnerable now; the tension has relaxed too suddenly . . . and although the Falangists' persecution has been ended, Cameron turns to look at his office door, knowing what he will see:

The doorknob opened a blue eye and looked at him.

This story, like its companion, is handicapped by the author's scrupulous attempts to keep a straight face; but in this one at least the attentive reader can detect the traces of Kuttner's boisterous (silent) laughter in the background.

Ballantine Books has just released their first science fiction book. This is an anthology of original stories, issued in hard covers for \$1.50 and paperbound for 35¢. As the first of a line of such original science fiction books, this one looks highly promising. There are fifteen stories by such writers as Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, del Rey, Gold, Kornbluth, Kuttner, Leinster, Simak and Wyndham. While a number of the stories can't be called classics, they average higher than many of the so-called classics being anthologized from the magazines, and you can be sure of getting material you haven't already read before. At least half a dozen of the stories are worth the price of the book individually. A brilliant beginning, all in all.

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POLICE YOUR PLANET

BY ERIK VAN LHIN

ILLUSTRATED BY ORBAN

When Gordon found himself in the middle of a revolution, he also found himself firmly in the middle with one foot on each side—and his neck being fitted for a hangman's noose!

SYNOPSIS: *BRUCE GORDON has been exiled to Mars by Solar Security for revealing top-secret information in his newspaper column. There, in disgust, he plots to make a quick stake and return to Earth illegally. At the home of MOTHER COREY, a monstrous man who seems to live by sheltering crooks, he meets HONEST IZZY, a little native knife expert. After a fiasco involving SHEILA COREY, gang moll granddaughter of Mother Corey, he loses everything except enough to buy a commission on the corrupt local police force. Izzy also joins. Graft is good, but the kickbacks keep him down to no more than a hundred credits—not enough even to think of buying illegal*

passage to Earth. Mother Corey goes respectable, moving to a rooming house inside the big dome over the better part of Marsport.

Gordon is sent outside to the worst slum area to work under Whaler, a police Captain imported from Earth to clean up the gangs. They do too well—they hurt the chances of gang-supported MAYOR WAYNE in the coming elections. Whaler is busted down, and Gordon is assigned to CAPTAIN TRENCH of the Seventh Precinct.

During the elections, Whaler reveals he is a Security Agent. He's captured by Trench—a renegade from Security—but saved by Gordon. Wounded and dying, he tells Gordon that hell

is brewing, and that he's turning over the responsibility to be head of Security on Mars to Gordon. Gordon seems to promise, and receives a notebook giving names and information.

But then Sheila Corey manages to sneak in and steal the book. Since she has had repeated run-ins with Gordon, he feels she will turn it over to Trench.

But there is nothing he can do about it. He leaves the body of Whaler in an alley and goes looking for a phone to report in.

IX

ELECTIONS were over, but the few dim lights along the street showed only boarded-up and darkened buildings. There were sounds of stirring, but no one was trusting that the election-day brawls were completely ended yet. It was a nervous, lost sort of unquiet that lay over Marsport, as if the city knew what the next four years under the administration of Mayor Wayne would bring.

Gordon hesitated, then swung glumly toward a corner where he could find a police call-box. He'd have preferred a public phone, where he could get away if the answers sounded wrong. But the automatic signal turned in by the box probably wouldn't matter. If Trench were looking

for him, he'd be picked up sooner or later, anyhow.

He heard a tiny patrol car turn the corner and ducked back into another alley to wait for it to go by. But they weren't looking for him. Their spotlight caught a running boy, clutching a few thin copies of the *Crusader* under a scrawny arm.

After the cops had dumped the unconscious kid into the back of the small squad car and gone looking for more game, Gordon went over to look at the tattered scraps left of the opposition paper, with dirt smudged into its still-wet ink.

Randolph wasn't preaching this time, but was content to report the facts he'd seen. There had been at least ninety known killings, outside of gangsters, and an uncounted number not reported. Mobs had fought citizens outside the main market for three solid hours, though that had been done with comparatively little gunfire. And there was a poorly reproduced photo of a group of mobsters lining citizens up under drawn guns for a propaganda movie of Mayor Wayne watching the "orderly" elections!

Yet in spite of all the ballot-stuffing and intimidations, the outlying vote had almost won. Wayne hadn't returned by a landslide; he'd barely squeaked



through by a four percent majority. Even some of the mobsters must have sneaked in honest votes against Wayne.

It was obvious that the current administration could never win another election, and that this was their last chance. They'd really have to concentrate all their efforts into the next four years. Marsport wasn't going to be a pleasant place to live.

It also meant that the chances of a cop who might be somehow mixed up with Security would be practically nil. If Sheila Corey turned him in, they wouldn't bother asking whether her story was true or not—they'd get him on the chance it might be.

But as long as he was stuck on Mars, he couldn't do much but play along and hope. He lifted the cradled phone from the box. "Gordon reporting," he announced.

A startled grunt came from the instrument, followed by the clicks of hasty switching. In less than fifteen seconds, Trench's voice barked out of the phone. "Gordon? Where the hell you been?"

"Up an alley between McCutcheon and Miles," Gordon told him. "With a corpse. Whaler's corpse. Better send out the wagon."

Trench hesitated only a fraction of a second. "Okay, I'll be out in ten minutes."

Gordon clumped back to the alley and bent for a final inspection of Whaler's body to make sure nothing would prove the flaws in his weakly-built story. Using Trench's flight from the Star Point mob, he could claim he'd thought Whaler had just been rescued from them, which was why he'd freed the man. The time lapse could be taken care of by claiming they'd gotten lost in backstreet Marsport, which was possible enough. But he'd have to go carefully in hinting that Whaler had first tried to get him to send a message to Earth and then had admitted he was a Security agent—letting Trench think he'd been killed by Gordon, without saying so.

It seemed like a pretty thin alibi, now that he thought it over. But it was too late to think up a new one. Trench was better than his word. He swung his gray car up to the alley in seven minutes.

The door slammed behind him, a beam snapped out from his flashlight into the alley, and then he was beside Whaler's body. He threw the light to Gordon and stooped to run expert hands over the corpse and through the pockets.

Finally he stood up, frowning.

"He's dead, all right. I don't get it. If you hadn't reported in . . . Gordon, did he try to make you think he was—"

"Security?" Gordon filled in. "Yeah. Claimed he was head of it here, and wanted me to send a message to Earth for him."

Trench nodded, with a touch of relief on his face. "Crazy! Must have been the beating the Star Pointers gave him before my men and I got to him."

Gordon grimaced faintly. Apparently part of his explanation had been obvious enough a distortion that Trench had also chosen it. It was unexpected, but it made things simpler.

"Crazy," Trench repeated. "He must have been to spin that story around men who just might have a few grudges against the whole Security goon squad . . . By the way, thanks for killing that sniper. You're a good shot. I'd be dead if you weren't, I guess."

Gordon made no comment, and Trench worried it around in his mind for a minute more. When he spoke, the edge was gone from his voice, leaving a grim amusement in it. "I could start a nasty investigation, I guess. I'll take care of it. Good thing you got him before he went completely berserk. These guys who crack up after being in authority

for years aren't safe loose. Give me a hand, and I'll take care of all this . . . Want me to drop you off?"

They wangled the body into the trunk of the car. Then it was good to relax while Trench drove along the rubble-piled and nearly deserted streets. Gordon heard a sigh from beside him, and realized Trench must have been under tension, too, with Whaler free and trying to call Earth with the news that Isiah Trench had betrayed Security.

But it hadn't hurt the man's thinking, Gordon reflected bitterly. He had Whaler's body—and he'd take care of it, all right; he'd probably have it mummified out in the dry sands, to use as evidence that Gordon had murdered the man if necessary—an extra ace in the hole.

They didn't speak until Trench stopped in front of Mother Corey's place. Then the captain turned and stuck out his hand. "Congratulations, by the way. I forgot to tell you, but you won the lottery; you're sergeant from now on. Keep your nose clean, and you'll do all right!"

Gordon watched the car disappear down the street. Trench had the body of Whaler. Sheila had the notebook. His nose was already a long ways from clean. One word from her and he'd probably be killed without know-

ing it; or a change of heart from Trench and he'd be in the gentler hands of Security—and wish he had been killed.

Then he grimaced. He'd forgotten that he *was* Security here, according to what Whaler had delegated to him. The white hope of Mars! He spat on the step and went past the two guards Mother Corey still had posted.

Inside, a thick effluvium hit his nose, and he turned to see Mother Corey's huge bulk waddling down the hall. The old man nodded. "We thought you'd gone on the lam, cobber. But I guess you've cooled. Good, good. As a respectable man now, I couldn't have stashed you from the cops—though I might have been tempted—mighty tempted." His face was melancholy. "Tell me, lad, did they get Whaler?"

Gordon nodded, and the old man sighed. Something suspiciously like a tear glistened in his eyes. He shook his head from side to side, stirring up the odor about him again.

"I thought you were taking a bath," Gordon commented.

The old man chuckled, without changing his expression, though the gray folds of flesh drew back to expose his snagged teeth. "Fate's against me, cobber. With all the shooting, some punk put

a bullet clean through the wall and the plastic of the tub. Fifty gallons of water, all wasted!"

He turned back toward the end of the hall, sighing again, as if he could read the other's hunch that he'd made up the story to cover his loss of nerve. Gordon went up the stairs, noticing that Izzy's door was open. The little man was stretched out on the bunk in his clothes, filthy; one side of his face was swollen to double size.

"Hi, gov'nor," he called out, and his voice was still cheerful. "I had odds you'd beat the ticket, though the Mother and me were worried there for awhile. How'd you grease the fix?"

Gordon sketched it in, without mentioning Security. "What happened to you, Izzy?"

"Price of being honest. I got this, and I lost a couple of knives, you might say. But the gees who paid me protection didn't get hurt, gov'nor. When you get paid for somethng, you gotta deliver." He winced as he turned his head, then grinned. "So they pay double tomorrow. Honesty pays, gov'nor, if you squeeze it once in a while . . . Funny, you making sergeant; I thought two other gees won the lottery."

So the promotion had come from Trench, as he'd suspected.

It bothered him. When a turkey sees corn on the menu, it's time to start wondering when Thanksgiving comes.

He shut the door as he came out of Izzy's room and started down the hall. But the sound of heavy breathing near the stairs made him swing back, to see little Randolph literally crawling toward his room.

The pale, rabbit-like face turned up to meet him, and the watery eyes shook off some of the agony. There was a sneer in them as he worked his crushed lips and forced a hoarse whisper through them. "Congratulations, muck-raker. Your boy's back in the saddle!"

Then he collapsed. But he came to before Gordon could finish trying to patch him up and put him to bed. His lips were stuck now, and he had to point to his clothes. Gordon found a copy of Wayne's official *Chronicle*, with a full page on how Wayne had triumphed over a combination of bribed votes and outlawry among the Star Point and smaller opposition gangs. The paper was an extra, smeared and battered by what Randolph had been through, but still legible. On an inside page, the little man located what he wanted and held it out—a brief paragraph on how Bruce Gordon had been promoted to sergeant for brav-

ery in overcoming a dangerous maniac.

Randolph's lips finally came open. "Get out!" he said flatly.

Gordon got. He found Mother Corey and sent him to look after the publisher, grumbling and fuming that this was a rooming house, not a rest home. Then he slipped through the entrance seal and out onto the street. Some signs of life were appearing again. He located a tricycle cab and gave the address of *Fat's Place* without thinking about it.

The streets were still in a shambles from the struggles for control of the voting booths, but Fats was open, and nothing seemed to have been harmed. From the way the man greeted him, Gordon suspected Izzy must have had something to do with that.

"Tables are open," Fats suggested. "Grab yourself a stack of chips on the house. Or maybe you'd like an intro to one of the duchesses?"

Gordon started to ask for beer, and then changed his mind. "How's the chance of getting some food, Fats?" He still hadn't eaten.

Fats looked slightly shocked, but he nodded. "Sure. Grab a seat at the bar. Kitchen's closed, but I'll have Mike dig up something. Coming up!"

It was a rough crowd in the place, Gordon saw—mostly men from the gangs getting rid of their spoils, with only a scattering of normal citizens, all either driven by fevered urgency or gloomy resignation. Gordon caught himself looking for Sheila and cursed himself. He'd already stayed too long on this damned planet.

When the steak and fried Marsapples came, he ate half of the meal automatically, but without any real appetite. Damn it, he'd never been a muck-raker. He'd been dirty at times, but as a reporter he'd played for clean stakes. He'd been able to look himself in the mirror when he shaved. But what was the use here? Whaler and his crusading had proved the same thing Randolph was proving with his.

He downed a couple of needled beers and then got up in disgust to head back to his room. He'd make collections tomorrow. And they'd better be good.

They were good, all week, probably as a result of Izzy's actions. Even after he arranged to pay his income tax and turned over his "donation" to the fund, he was well ahead for the first time since he'd landed here. In a couple of months, he could begin to think about hunting up illegal passage back to Earth.

He had become almost superstitious about the way he was always left with no more than a hundred credits in his pockets. This time, he stripped himself to that sum at once, depositing the rest in the First Marsport Bank. Maybe it would break the jinx.

Then collections fell off. The Mayor had wangled a special tax to take care of the election damage, and the cops were being driven hard to collect it. The joints met it with resignation, but the poorer section of his beat was a problem. People had reached the limit. Even Blaine from the Tenth, who had a reputation for being too free with brass knuckles on slow payers, was said to be behind his quota.

In the end, they were forced to tap the joints to make up for the people who couldn't pay. That started the day Gordon collected finally from one small shopkeeper and came back two hours later to find the man hanging by a rope from the ceiling of his store.

"No guts," Izzy commented. "Hell, if you think he had it tough, gov'nor, you shoulda seen the way my old man went to work the day he died. Starved to death. Fell over dead on the job. You gotta have it under the belt here." But he went along with

Gordon's suggestion about tapping the joints.

They were one of the few teams in the Seventh Precinct to make full quota. Trench was lavish in his praise. He was playing more than fair with Gordon now, but there was a basic suspicion in his eyes. He had decided to accept things—but he hadn't been convinced. And he was waiting warily for further developments.

The next day, he drafted them for a trip outside the dome. "It's easy enough, and you'll get plenty of credit in the fund for it. I need two men who can keep their mouths shut."

They idled around the station through the morning. In the late afternoon, they left in a big truck capable of hauling what would have been fifty tons on Earth. Trench drove. Outside the dome, the electric motor carried them along at a steady twenty miles an hour, almost silently.

It was Gordon's first look at the real Mars. He saw small villages where crop prospectors and hydro farmers lived, with a few small industrial sections scattered over the desert. As they moved out, he saw the slow change from the beaten appearance of Marsport to something that seemed no worse than would be found among the share-crop-

pers back on Earth. It was obvious that Marsport was the poison center here.

Some of the younger children were running around without helmets, confirming Aimsworth's claim that third generation Martians somehow learned to adapt to the atmosphere. In them, the sure end of Marsport was being spelled out—but it would take another thirty years, and Gordon never expected to see it.

Darkness fell sharply, as it always did in Mars' thin air, but they went on, heading out into the dunes of the desert. When they finally stopped, they were beside a small, battered space ship. Boxes were piled all around it, and others were being tossed out. Trench leaped from the truck, motioning them to follow, and they began loading the crates hastily. It took about an hour of hard work to load the last of them, and Trench was working harder than they were. Finished, he went up to one of the men from the ship, handed over an envelope, and came back to start the truck back toward Marsport. As the dunes dwindled behind them, Gordon could see the brief flare of the little rocket taking off.

They drove back through the night as rapidly as the truck could manage. Finally, they

rolled into City Hall, down a ramp, and onto an elevator that took them three levels down. Trench climbed out and nodded in satisfaction. "That's it. Take tomorrow off, if you want, and I'll fix credit for you. But just remember you haven't seen anything. You don't know any more than our old friend Whaler!"

He led them to a smaller elevator, and then swung back to the truck.

"Guns," Gordon said slowly. "Guns and contraband ammunition for the administration from Earth. And they must have paid half the graft they've taken for that. It's still considered treason to ship anything bigger than a revolver off Earth. What the hell do they want it for?"

Izzy jerked a shoulder upwards and a twist ran across his pockmarked face. "War, what else? Gov'nor, Earth must be boiling about the election. Maybe Security's getting set to spring. And we're going to be caught in a revolution—right where the big push is gonna hit!"

The idea of Marsport rebelling against Earth seemed ridiculous. Even with guns, they wouldn't have a chance if Earth sent a force of any strength to back Security. But it was the only explanation. Things got better all the time. In such a rebellion, he couldn't join Earth without hav-

ing Trench spread the word that he'd killed Whaler; and he couldn't risk sticking to Trench and then having Sheila claim he was a spy!

He took the next day off to look for her, but nobody would admit having seen her. He couldn't understand why she hadn't already struck at him. Or had she already gone to Trench, and was Trench just baiting him, fattening him for the kill?

He had seen the crowds beginning to assemble all afternoon, but had paid no attention to them. Now he found the way back to Corey's blocked by a mob, and it finally registered. He studied them for a moment. This was no gang movement; there was too much desperation there as they milled and fought to move forward.

Then he saw that the object of it all was the First Marsport Bank. It was only toward that that the shaking fists were raised. Gordon managed to get onto a pile of rubble where he could see over the crowd. The doors of the bank were locked shut, but men were attacking it with an improvised battering ram. As he watched, a pompous little man came to the upper window over the door and began motioning for attention. The crowd quieted almost at once,

except for a single yell, "When do we get our money?"

"Please. Please." The voice reached back thinly as the bank president got his silence. "Please. It won't do you any good. Not a bit. We're broke. Not a cent left! And don't go blaming me, I didn't start the rush. Your friends did that. They took all the money, and now we're cleaned out. You can't . . ."

A rope rose from the crowd and settled around him. In a second, he was pulled down, and the crowd surged forward. They used only their hands on him—but his shrieks cut off a moment later in a final wild cry.

Gordon dropped from the rubble, staring at the bank. He'd played it safe this time—he'd put his money away, to make sure he'd have it. And now he was back to the old familiar pattern—less than a hundred credits to his name!

A heavy hand fell on his shoulder, and he turned to see Mother Corey there. "That's the way a panic is, cobber," the man said. "There's a run, then everything is ruined. I tried to get you when I first heard the rumor, but you were gone. And when this starts, a man has to get there first." He patted his side, where a bulge showed. "And I just made it, too. Bound to come, but who'd guess it was going to be so soon.

Started here and spread. By now, there won't be a bank in Marsport that isn't busted."

The mob was beginning to break up now, but it was still in an ugly mood. Gordon stepped into a narrow passageway at the side, and Mother Corey followed. "But what started it?"

"Rumors that Mayor Wayne got a big loan from the bank—and why not, seeing it was his bank! Nobody had to guess that he'd never pay it back, so—" Mother Corey swept his hand toward the crowd. "Ever see a panic, cobber? Well, you will."

"Where's Izzy?" Gordon asked. He was sick at the loss of his money, but somehow the stark tragedy on the faces around made him even sicker. "Never mind, I can guess. See you later."

Somehow, he managed to avoid most of the shouting groups as he headed back for his beat. He found Izzy organizing the bouncers from the joints and some of the citizens into a squad. Every joint was closed down tightly already. Gordon began organizing his own squad.

Izzy slipped over as he began to get them organized. "If we hold past midnight, we'll be set, gov'nor," he said. "They go crazy for a while, and the gangs come out for the pickings, too. But give 'em a few hours, and

they stop most of it. Most of them will probably hit for the food stores or the liquor shops. But a few smart gees are gonna figure the joints have money, and money always talks. I figure you know where all the scratch went?"

"Sure—guns from Earth! The damned fools!"

"Yeah. But not fools. Just bloody well informed, gov'nor. Earth's sending a fleet—got official word of it. No way of telling how big, but it's coming." The little man spat onto the ground, and felt for his knives. Then he grinned crookedly, and headed back to his group.

It gave Gordon something to think about while they patrolled the beat. But he had enough for a time without that. The mobs left the section alone, apparently scared off by the organized group ready and waiting for them. But every street and alley had to be kept under constant surveillance to drive out the angry, desperate men who were trying to get something to hang onto before everything collapsed. He saw stores being broken into beyond his beat, and brawls as one drunken, crazed crowd met another. But he kept to his own territory, knowing that there was nothing he could do beyond it.

By midnight, as Izzy had

promised, the people had begun to quiet down, however. The anger and hysteria were giving way to a sullen, beaten hopelessness. Most of them had never had any money to lose; they would suffer in the general depression that must follow, but it was a vague threat still, now that the first shock had worn off.

Honest Izzy finally seemed satisfied to turn things over to the regular night men. Gordon waited around a while longer, but finally headed back to Mother Corey's place. There were still clumps of people about, but their muscles were now slack with defeat instead of taut with fury. He wondered how many would be on the breadlines within a month—and whether there would be any breadlines, with the battle between Earth and Marsport draining the administration's funds.

He met Randolph coming out of the house, and tried to avoid him. But the little man stopped squarely in front of him. The scars were still livid, but he seemed fit enough again.

"Gordon," he said quickly, "I behaved like a louse. I had no business dragging your Earth record into things here. Anyhow, it was a damned swinish thing to make use of your help and then chase you out. I'm apologizing!"

"Forget it," Gordon began.

But the publisher had already gone down the steps. He went inside, weary in every bone of his body. "Hi, Mother."

Mother Corey motioned him back and put a cup of steaming coffee into his hands. "You look worse than I do, cobber. Worse than even that granddaughter of mine. She was here looking for you!"

"Sheila?" Gordon jerked the word out.

"Yeah. She left a note for you. I put it up in your room." Mother Corey chuckled. "Why don't you two get married and make your fighting legal?"

"Thanks for the coffee," Gordon threw back at him. He was already mounting the stairs.

He tossed his door open and found the letter on his bed. He knew it would be bad news, but he had to find out how bad. He ripped the envelope open.

A single sheet of paper fell out, together with the torn-off front cover of the notebook. He spread the sheet out, and glanced at the writing on it.

"I'd rather go to Wayne," it said. "But I need money. If you want the rest of this, you've got until three tonight to make an offer. If you can find me, maybe I'll listen."

He crushed it savagely and tossed it into the corner. It was a quarter after three already,

he was practically broke—and he had no idea where she could be found.

X

GORDON jerked the door open to yell for Izzy while he tucked the bit of notebook cover into his pocket. Then he stopped as something nibbled at his mind. Finally he closed the door silently. Izzy might know the answers, but he regarded it as dishonest to give away valuable information free—that was cutting the rates, and simply not done.

Then the odor Gordon had smelled before registered. He yanked out the bit of notebook and sniffed. It hadn't been close enough for any length of time to be contaminated by Mother Corey, so the smell could only come from one place. And it was logical enough, when he thought about it.

He checked the batteries on his suit and put it on quickly. There was no point in wearing the helmet inside the dome, but it was better than trying to rent one at the lockers. There was no reason he should conceal going outside, anyhow. He buckled it to a strap. The knife slid into its sheathe, and the gun holster snapped onto the suit. As a final thought, he nicked up the stout

locust stick he'd used under Whaler.

There were no cabs outside tonight, of course. But he hadn't expected to find one. He'd have had to walk from the dome entrance, anyhow. It wouldn't matter. He had to gamble on the fact that Sheila wouldn't actually try to see Wayne or one of his assistants until morning, in spite of the note. As for the other details, he'd take care of them when the need arose.

He struck out at a steady lope. He hadn't been exercising his Earth muscles, but they were still better than those of most of the people here, and the light gravity helped. Exhausted as he had been, he could still put a good six miles behind him every hour.

The streets were almost deserted now, except for some prowler or desperation-driven drug addict. The people who had been hit by the failure had retired at last to lick their wounds in private.

He proceeded cautiously, however, realizing that it would be just like her to lay an ambush for him. He was half hoping she would, since it would save time. But he reached the exit from the dome with no trouble.

"Special pass to leave at this hour," the guard there reminded

him. "Of course, if it's urgent, pal . . ."

Gordon was in no mood to try bribes. He let his hand drop to the gun. "Police Sergeant Gordon, on official business," he said curtly. "Get the hell out of my way."

The guard thought it over without taking time to draw a breath and reached for the release. Gordon swung back as he passed through. "And you'd better be ready to open when I come back," he warned the guard.

He was in comparative darkness almost at once, and tonight there was no sign of the lights of patrolling cops. They'd all been pulled back into the dome to keep down trouble there, probably. Nobody cared too much what happened outside. There were only the few phosphor bulbs at the corners. Gordon let his own light remain unlighted, threading his way along. He'd have to depend on the faint markers and on his own memory.

A vague shadow moved out of the darker inkiness around him, and a whining voice came from the other's Marspeaker. "Got a credit, gov'nor? Lost my money in the crash 'n I got three starving kids, 'n—"

The faint tightening of his voice gave him away. Gordon sidestepped, flicking on his helmet light, just as the heavy

bludgeon crashed forward in the hand of the man behind him. He stepped in again as the man went off balance, and brought the locust stick down sharply across the back of the helmet.

He swung without waiting to see whether the neck or the helmet had given—the results would be the same out here. The set-up man was just drawing his knife back for a long, awkward overhand throw. Gordon sent the club sailing toward him. The other ducked, pulling his arm down, and Gordon was on him.

Whaler had taught him one thing that was probably more valuable for survival here than anything else, and that was complete ruthlessness when dealing with such men. It was the man who didn't care how badly he hurt the other who would usually win—and even the supposedly tough customers usually had some squeamishness. He flipped the other over with a single heave and went to work with his recovered club on the small of the back. It wasn't until the screams faded out that he stopped.

He didn't look back as he walked on. The parasites went on killing, robbing and terrorizing in the night out here against thousands of citizens who were honest and just out of luck. Yet a hundred men willing to handle

them properly could probably clean up the whole mess—a hundred men and a government that would back them up.

Then three specks of glaring blue light suddenly appeared in the sky, jerking his eyes up. They were dropping rapidly, and the tongues of flame were blazing wider now. Rockets, landing at night. The rocket field in the distance was glaring brightly in the downward wash of fire from them.

Rockets that flamed bright blue . . . the forces from Earth, arriving in military rockets! He wished he knew more of the force each might carry, but that was of only secondary importance. The major thing was that Earth was finally taking a hand! And he was no more ready for it than was the administration of Wayne, if as much so.

He crouched in a hollow that had once been some kind of a basement, out of reach of prowlers, until the ships had landed and cut off their jets. Then he stood up, blinking his eyes until they could again make out the pattern of the dim bulbs. He'd seen enough by the rocket glare to know that he was headed right, at least. Now, more than ever, he had to take care of the immediate situation.

Twice he heard the sounds of someone near, but none came

close enough to bother him. And finally the ugly half-cylinder of patched brick and metal that was the old Mother Corey's Chicken Coop showed up against the faint light from the rocket field. It looked even more of a wreck than before, if that were possible.

He moved in cautiously and as silently as he could, wondering if there would be sentries staked outside. Not unless Sheila had expected him, but he couldn't be sure. He finally located the semi-secret entrance to the building without meeting anyone. Once in the tunnel that led to the building, he felt a little safer. He could still stumble on someone, but the element of surprise would be all on his side in that event.

He started to remove his helmet, once he reached the dimness of the old mainfloor hall, but the stench made him change his mind. Then he reconsidered again—without it, he'd seem more like one of whatever inmates there still were. He removed it and strapped it to the back of his suit, out of the way. The old hall was in worse shape than before. For a second, he resented the way the place had gone to pot, before the ridiculousness of the idea hit him.

Yet it wasn't entirely ridiculous. Mother Corey had run a

somewhat orderly place, with constant vigilance; he could never have come into the hallway without being seen in the old days. And there was the feeling of petty criminal evil here now. Before, the "guests" had been mostly those who lived by their wits, just outside the law, rather than muggers and cut-throats.

Then a pounding sound came from the second floor, and Gordon drew back into the denser shadows, staring upwards. There were shouts and more bangings, but nothing he could see. A heavy, thick voice picked up the exchange of shouts.

"You, Sheila, you come outa there! You come right out or I'ma gonna blast that there door down with gunpowder. You open up."

Gordon was already moving up the stairs when a second voice reached him, and this one was familiar. "Jurgens don't want you, you outland bat! All he wants is this place—we got use for it. It don't belong to you, anyhow! Come out now, and we'll let you go peaceful. Or stay in there and we'll blast you out—in pieces."

It was the voice of Jurgens' henchman who had called on Mother Corey before elections. The thick voice must belong to the big ape who'd been with him.

"Come on out," the little man cried again. "You don't have a chance. We've already chased all your boarders out!"

Gordon tried to remember which steps had creaked the worst, but he wasn't too worried, if there were only two of them. Then his head projected above the top step, and he hesitated. Only the rat and the ape were standing near a heavy, closed door. But four others were lounging in the background, apparently amused by the trouble their chief was having.

He knew he'd be a fool to go on against that number. He lifted his foot to put it back down to a lower step, just as Sheila's muffled voice shrilled out a fog of profanity. He grinned, and then saw that he'd lifted his foot to a higher step. All right, then, he decided.

There was a sharp yell from one of the men in the background and a knife sailed for him, but the aim was poor. Gordon's gun came out. Two of the men were dropping before the others could reach for their own weapons, and while the rat-faced man was just turning. The third dropped without firing, and the fourth's shot went wild. Gordon was firing rapidly, but not with such a stupid attempt at speed that he couldn't aim each shot.

And at that distance, it was hard to miss.

Rat-face jerked back behind the big hulk of his partner, trying to pull a gun that seemed to be stuck; a scared man's ability to get his gun stuck in a simple holster was always amazing. The big guy made no attempt to reach for a weapon. He simply lunged, with his big hands out.

Gordon sidestepped and caught one of the big arms, swinging the huge body over one hip. It sailed over the broken railing, to land on the floor below and crash through the rotten planking. He heard the man hit the basement, even while he was swinging the club in his hand toward the rat-faced man.

There was a thin, high-pitched scream as a collar-bone broke. He slumped onto the floor, and began to try hitching his way down the steps, holding onto his shattered shoulder with the other hand and whimpering with each movement, his eyes fixed in glazed horror on Gordon's club.

Gordon picked up the gun that had fallen out of the holster as the man fell and put it into his pouch. He considered the two, and decided they would be no menace. The big guy had probably broken his neck, and the smaller one was thinking only of getting away.

"Okay, Sheila," he called out,

trying to muffle his voice. "We got them all."

"Pie-Face?" Her voice was doubtful. "Did you decide to come back?"

He considered what a man out here who went under that name might be like, and finally guessed at the proper expression. "Sure, baby. Open up!"

"Wait a minute. I've got this nailed shut." There was the sound of an effort of some kind going on as she talked. "Though I ought to let you stay out there and rot. Damn it, if you'd stuck with me, we could have chased them off in the first place. I told you when I rented rooms to you and your boys that you'd have to give a hand. But no, the first time there's any trouble . . . uh!"

The door heaved open then, and she appeared in it, working herself up into a fine rage. Then she saw him, and her jaw dropped open slackly. "You!"

"Me," he agreed. "And lucky for you, Cuddles."

Her hand streaked to a gun in her belt, and she let out a cry to someone behind her. "Kill him!"

This time, he didn't wait to be attacked. He went for the door, knocking her aside with his shoulder. His knee caught the outside of her hip as she spun, and she fell over, the gun spinning out of her hand.

The two men in the room were

apparently the same two who had tackled him among Nick the Croop's trucks. They were both holding knives, but in the ridiculous overhand position that seems to be an ingrained stupidity of the human race, until it's taught better. A single flip of his locust club against their wrists accounted for both of the knives. He grabbed them by the hair of their heads, then, and brought the two skulls together savagely. They both continued to breathe, but neither knew about it.

Sheila lay stretched out on the floor where her head had apparently struck against the leg of a bed. Gordon shoved the bodies of the two men aside and looked down at the wreck of a man who lay on the dirty blanket. "Hello, O'Neill," he said. "So they let you out?"

The former leader of the Stonewall gang stared up at the club swinging from Gordon's wrist, and a tongue ran rapidly over dry lips. His voice was almost a whisper. "You ain't gonna beat me this time? I'm a sick man. Sick. Can't hurt nobody. You want some money? I got a few credits. Take it and go away. Don't beat me again."

Gordon's stomach knotted sickly at the product of a thorough lesson in ruthlessness. Doing something under the pressure of necessity or in the heat



of a struggle was one thing; but to see the sorry results of it later was another.

"All right," he said. "Just stay there until I get away from this rat's nest and I won't hit you. I won't even touch you."

He was sure enough that it was no act on O'Neill's part. The man couldn't have acted that well. He'd had the guts ripped out of his soul, and no surgeon would ever be able to put them back. He might have taken worse beatings in and out of combat—but he hadn't been able to take a deliberate, cold-blooded working over on the street where he'd been king.

Gordon wasn't so sure about Sheila. She lay as if stunned, with a slow rising and falling of her chest. But he'd learned to suspect her in all things. He checked the two men on the floor, who were still out cold. Then he stepped through the door carefully, to make sure that the big bruiser hadn't somehow lived and come back.

His ears barely detected the sound she made as she reached for the knife of one of the men. He could follow her movements as she gathered herself together and turned carefully to face him, though he wouldn't have noticed it if he'd been as intent on the stairwell as he seemed.

Then it came—the faintest

catch of breath. Gordon threw himself flat to the floor. She let out a scream as he saw her momentum carry her over him. Her heels dug into his ribs, but he'd expected it. Then she was at the edge of the rail, and starting to fall.

He caught her feet in his hands and yanked her back. There was nothing phoney this time as she hit the floor. It was a solid thud that knocked the wind out of her.

"Just a matter of coordination, Cuddles," he told her as she rocked back and forth trying to get her breath back. "Little girls shouldn't play with knives, anyway. They'll grow up to be old maids that way—or worse."

The fury of hell blackened her face, but she still couldn't function. She made a sound that might have been involuntary or was one she'd heard cats using in the back alleys of Earth and tried feebly to scratch at his eyes.

He picked her up and tossed her back into the room. From the broken mattress on the bed, he dug out a coil of wire and bound her hands and feet with it.

"Can't say I think much of your choice of companions these days," he commented, looking toward the bed where O'Neill was cowering. "It looks as if your

grandfather picks them better for you."

The funny part was that his own stomach felt as if he'd been bounced on the floor. The prospect of her living with this battered wreck of a man was disgusting to him. It was none of his business, but . . .

She spat out curses at him then, strangling over them. "You filthy-minded hog! D'you think I'd—I'd—I wouldn't eat at the same table with the finest man who ever lived! One room in the place with a decent door, and you can't see why I'd choose that room to keep Jurgens' devils back. You—You—"

He'd been searching the room, but there was no sign of the notebook there. He checked again to see that the wire was tight, and then picked up the two henchmen who were showing some signs of reviving.

"I'll watch them," a voice said from the door. Gordon snapped his head up to see Izzy standing there. He realized he'd been a lot less cautious than he'd thought. It could have been one of her men as easily as the little knifeman. He dropped the two back to the floor.

Izzy grinned at his confusion. "I got enough out of the Mother to case the pitch," he said. "I knew I was right when I spotted the apeman carrying a guy with

a bad shoulder away from here. Jurgens' punks, eh?"

"Thanks for coming," Gordon said doubtfully. "But what's it going to cost me?"

"Wouldn't be honest to charge unless you asked me to convoy you, gov'nor. And if you're looking for the vixen's room, it's where you bunked before. I got around after I spotted you here."

Sheila forced herself to a sitting position and spat at Izzy. "Traitor! Scummy half-pint crooked little traitor!"

"Shut up, Sheila," Izzy said. "Your retainer ran out."

Surprisingly, she did shut up. Gordon shook his head and went to the little space where he'd first bunked. He saw that Izzy was right; there were a couple of things there—a nearly-used-up lipstick, a comb, and a cracked mirror. There was also a small cloth bag containing a few scraps of clothes, but he scowled as he pawed through them. He'd learned long ago that a woman without decent underthings will always be more naked than one with no clothes.

He turned the room upside down, but there was no sign of the notebook or papers in it. He hadn't expected to find it here, though. Anything like that would be kept where she could be sure it wasn't found—which meant on her person.

He located her helmet and carried it down with him. "You're going bye-bye, Cuddles," he told her. "I'm going to put this on you and then unfasten your arms and legs. But if you start to so much as wiggle your big toe, you won't sit down for a month. That's a promise."

She pursed her lips hotly, but made no reply. He screwed the helmet on, and unfastened her arms. For a second, she tensed, while he waited, grinning down at her. Then she slumped back and lay quiet as he unfastened her legs.

He tossed her over his shoulder, and started down the rickety stairs. "See the rockets from Earth?" he asked Izzy.

"Yeah. Small ones, though. Can't be more than a hundred men on all three of them."

"Not with blue exhausts," Gordon told him. "With those direct atomic athodyds, those things are almost all carrying space. They could put a small army in them."

"Oh." Izzy thought it over. "M-Day, eh? Well, I ain't worrying any more about it until I learn more, gov'nor."

Gordon wished he could honestly say the same. Those rockets were bothering him plenty. If he could go to them and announce that Whaler had appointed him acting head of Security

here . . . But he had no proof, and there might be embarrassing questions about what he'd been doing since his appointment.

There were the beginnings of light in the sky. Five minutes later, it was full daylight, which should have been a signal for the workers to start for their jobs. But today they were drifting out unhappily, as if already sure there would be no jobs by nightfall. For a lot of them, it might be true. Most of the businesses of Mars had been mortgaged, and the bank failure would ruin a lot of them.

A few stared at Gordon and his burden, but most of them didn't even look up. The two men trudged along silently. Sheila had seemed light at first, but her weight was growing with every step. But Gordon was too stubborn to put her down.

"Prisoner," he announced crisply to the guard, but there was no protest this time, and she apparently knew it would be useless to put on a scene. They went through, and he was lucky enough to locate a broken-down tricycle cab.

Mother Corey let them in, without flickering an eyelash as he saw his granddaughter. Gordon dropped her onto her legs. "Behave yourself," he warned

her as he took off his helmet, and then unfastened hers.

Mother Corey chuckled. "Very touching, cobber. You have a way with women, it seems. Too bad she had to wear a helmet, or you might have dragged her by her hair. Ah, well, let's not talk about it here. My room is more comfortable—and private."

Inside, she sat woodenly on the little sofa, pretending to see none of them. Mother Corey looked from one to the other, and then back to Gordon. "Well? You must have had some reason for bringing her here, cobber."

"I want her out of my hair, Mother," Gordon tried to explain. It wasn't too clear to himself. "I can lock her up—carrying a gun without a permit is reason enough. But I'd rather you kept her here, if you'll take the responsibility for her. After all, she's your granddaughter."

"So she is. That's why I wash my hands of her. I couldn't control myself at her age, couldn't control my son—bad cess to him, dead though he is—and I don't intend to handle a female of my line. You might get Izzy to watch her, except that he's got a job. It looks as if you'll have to arrest her." The gray flesh shook on his face, and his few hairs bobbed about as he shrugged ponderously. But the little

eyes in their heavy lids were amused.

"Okay. Suppose I rent a room and put a good lock on it. You've got the one that connects with mine vacant."

"I run a respectable house now, Gordon," Mother Corey stated flatly. "What you do outside my place is your own business. But no women, except married ones. Can't trust 'em."

Gordon stared at the old man, but he apparently meant just what he said. "All right, Mother," he said finally. "How in hell do I marry her without any rigamarole? I understand you've got some system here."

Izzy's face seemed to drop toward the floor, and Sheila let out a gasp. She came up off the couch with a choking cry and leaped for the door. But Mother Corey's immense arm moved out casually, sweeping her back onto the couch..

"Very convenient," the old man said. "The two of you simply fill out a form—I've got a few left from the last time—and get Izzy and me to witness it. Drop it in the mail, and you are married. Of course, it isn't legal on any other planet, but I don't suppose you'll mind that too much, cobber!"

"If you think I'd marry you, you filthy—" Sheila began.

Mother Corey listened at-

tentively. "Rich, but not very imaginative," he said thoughtfully. "But she'll learn. Izzy, I have a feeling we should let them settle their differences."

As the door shut behind them, Gordon yanked Sheila back to the couch. "Shut up!" he told her. "This isn't a game this time. Hell's popping here—you know that better than most people. And I'm up to my neck in it. I should have killed you. But I'm still squeamish, I guess. If I've got to marry you to keep you out of my hair, I will."

Her face was paste white, but she put her hands together on her lap demurely, bent her head, and fluttered her eyelashes up at him. "So romantic," she sighed. "You sweep me off my feet. You—Why, you—"

"Me or Trench! Take your choice. I can take you to him and tell him you're mixed up in Security, and that you either have papers on you or out at the Chicken Coop to prove it. He'd probably believe you if you got to him first. But not if I take you in. You figure out what will happen. Well?"

She looked at him a long time in silence, and there was surprise in her eyes. "You'd do it! You really would . . . All right. I'll sign your damned papers!"

Ten minutes later, he stood in what was now a connecting

double room, watching Mother Corey nail up the hall door to the room that was to be hers. There were no windows here, and his own room had an excellent lock on it already—one he'd put on himself. Izzy came back as Mother Corey finished the door and began knocking a small panel out of the connecting door. The old man was surprisingly adept with his hands as he fitted hinges and a catch to the panel and re-installed it so that she could swing it open. He had considered Gordon crazy for requesting it, but he was doing a good job.

"They're married," Izzy said. "It's in the mail to the register, along with the twenty credits. Gov'nor, we're about due to report in."

Gordon nodded. "Be with you in a minute," he said as he paid Mother Corey for the materials and work. He jerked his head, and the two men went out, leaving him alone with Sheila.

"I'll bring you some food tonight. And you may not have a private bath, but it beats the Chicken Coop. Here." He handed her the key to the connecting door. "Keep your damned virtue. It's the only key there is."

She stared at it in amazement, and back to him. "I'm going to kill you someday," she told him in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You're going to try," he corrected her.

She nodded dumbly, and he went out, locking his door carefully behind him.

XI

All that day, the three rocket ships sat out on the field. Nobody went up to them, and nobody came from them; surprisingly, Wayne had found the courage to ignore them. But rumors were circulating wildly. If they were putting on a test of nerves, they were winning. Gordon felt his nerves creeping out of his skin and beginning to stand on end to test each breeze for danger.

Izzy seemed to have made up his mind about something, but he wasn't telling anyone. He went about the serious job of patrolling the beat and making his collections as quietly as ever.

And collections were good, in spite of the strains of the bank failure, now spreading like wildfire into all businesses. "Good business to be honest about your job," Izzy pointed out. "They take a look at what happened on other beats, and they figure they're getting something for their money, so they don't mind paying. It always paid me to stay honest, gov'nor."

With the credit they'd ac-

cumulated in the fund, nearly all their collection was theirs. Gordon went out to do some shopping. He stopped when his money was down to a hundred credits, hardly realizing what he was doing. When he went out, the street was going crazy.

Izzy had been waiting, and filled him in. At exactly sundown, the rocket ships had thrown down ramps, and a stream of jeeps had ridden down them and toward the south entrance to the dome. They had presented some sort of paper, and forced the guard to let them through. There were about two hundred men, some of them armed. They had driven straight to the huge, barnlike Employment Bureau, had chased out the few people remaining there, and had simply taken over. Now there was a sign in front which simply said MARS-PORT LEGAL POLICE FORCE HEADQUARTERS. Then the jeeps had driven back to the rockets, gone on board, and the ships had taken off, as if their job had been finished in setting up the new Force.

Gordon glanced at his watch, finding it hard to believe it could have been done so quickly. But time had gone by faster than he'd expected. It was two hours after sundown. Apparently the move had been timed to

correspond with the change in shift on the police force.

Now a surge in the crowd on the street indicated something, and a car with a loudspeaker on top rolled into view—a completely armored car. It stopped, and the speaker clacked once, and began operating.

"Citizens of Marsport! In order to protect your interests from the proven rapacity and illegality of the administration which has recently gained control again here, Earth has revoked the independent charter of Marsport for due cause. The past elections are hereby declared null and void. In their place, your home world has appointed Marcus Gannett as mayor, with Philip Crane as chief of police. Other members of the council will be by appointment during the interim period until legal elections can be held safely. The Municipal Police Force is disbanded, and the Legal Police Force is now being organized around the nucleus of men who have been established in the building where the mockery of justice known as employment relief has been held previously.

"All police and officers who remain loyal to their legal government, as admitted under Earth charter, will be accepted at their present grade or high-

er. To those who now leave the illegal Municipal Force and accept their duty with the Legal Force, there will be no question of past conduct or loyalty. Nor will they suffer financially from the change!

"Banks will be reopened as rapidly as the Legal Government can extend its control, and all deposits previously made will be honored in full."

That brought a cheer from the crowd, as the sound truck moved on. Gordon saw two of the police officers nearby fingering their badges thoughtfully.

Then another truck rolled into view, and the Mayor's canned voice came over it, panting as if he'd had to rush to make the recording. He began directly:

"Martians! Earth has declared war on us. She has denied us our right to rule ourselves—a right guaranteed in our charter. We admit there have been abuses; all young civilizations make mistakes. But we've developed and grown.

"This is an old pattern, fellow Martians! England tried it on her colonies three hundred years ago. And the people rose up and demanded their right to rule themselves. They had troubles with their governments, too—and they had panics. But they won their freedom, and it made

them great—so great that now that *one* nation—not all Earth, but that single nation!—is trying to do to us what she wouldn't permit to herself.

"Well, we don't have an army. But neither do they. They know the people of this world wouldn't stand for the landing of foreign—that's right, *foreign*—troops. So they're trying to steal our police force from us and use it for their war.

"Fellow Martians, they aren't going to bribe us into that! Mars has had enough. I declare us to be in a state of revolution. And since they have chosen the weapons, I declare our loyal and functioning Municipal Police Force to be *our* army. Any man who deserts will be considered a traitor. But any man who sticks will be rewarded more than he ever expected. We're going to protect our freedom.

"Let them open their banks—our banks—again. And when they have established your accounts, go in and collect the money! If they give it to you, Mars is that much richer. If they don't, you'll know they're lying.

"Let them bribe us if they like. We're going to win this war."

Gordon felt the crowd's reaction twist again, and he had to

admit that Wayne had played his cards well.

But it didn't make the question of where he belonged or what he should do any easier. He waited until the crowd had thinned out a little and began heading toward Corey's, with Izzy moving along silently beside him, carrying half the packages.

In any normal revolution, there should have been good chances for a man to get whatever he wanted. But this was more like a game in which the police would be the pieces.

He remembered the promise of forgiveness for all sins on joining the new Legal Force, but he'd read enough history to know that it was fine—as long as the struggle continued. Afterwards, promises grew dim, while the old crimes and faults rose up to plague a man more strongly than ever.

He had no use for the present administration. And yet, there was something to be said for its side. Certainly Earth had no right to take over without a formal examination, investigation, and a chance for the people to state their choice. If Security operated that way, it was blinder than he had thought.

Then he grimaced at himself. He was in no position to move according to right and wrong.

The only question that counted was how he had the best chance to ride out the storm, and to get back to Earth and a normal life. Fellow Martians! He'd almost swallowed it, too!

He was still in a brown study as he took the bundles from Izzy and dropped them on his bed. Izzy went out and he stood staring at the wall. Trench? The man might be a dangerous enemy, and he could sweeten the graft for Gordon; the collections were coming in well. Another two months and he might be able to go back—if any ships were operating. Or the new Commissioner Crane? If Earth should win—and they had most of the power, after all—and he fought against Security, the mines of Mercury were waiting for him! It was the old puzzle, going around and around, and getting nowhere. Only now it had to get somewhere.

He picked up the stuff from his bed and started to sweep it aside before he lay down. Then he remembered at last. He knocked on the panel. For a second, he thought she had somehow escaped. Then there was a sound. He rattled the panel again, until it finally opened a crack.

"Here," he told her. "Food, and some other stuff. There are

some refuse bags there, too. Yell when you want me to take them out."

She took the bundles woodenly until she came to a plastic can. Then she gasped. "Water! Two gallons!"

"There are heat tablets there, and a skin tub." The salesgirl had explained how one gallon was enough in the plastic bag that served as a tub; he had his doubts. "Detergent. The whole works."

She hauled the stuff in and started to close the panel. Then she hesitated. "I suppose I should thank you, but . . . But I don't like to be told I stink so much you can't stand me in the next room!"

"Hell, I've gotten so I can stand your grandfather," he answered. "It wasn't that."

The panel slammed shut. For some reason, she was cursing to herself. But he heard the gurgle of water after a while—at eight credits a bottle, and then for reprocessed stuff instead of re-distilled. It was a fine time to take on more responsibility.

But his body was dead from the lack of sleep the night before. He stretched out without taking off his clothes to worry about things, and then just stopped worrying. He'd just reached the blissful stage of knowing he was almost asleep

when he heard the key turn in the lock, and snapped up.

"Did you eat?" she asked. He nodded, rubbing his eyes. She was framed in the doorway, in a robe of some plastic fabric that was sold in the bargain basements on Earth, but came in only the one department store here. She hesitated, cleared her throat, and took a step into his room, to jump back as he sat up. "I—how does it look?"

"Looks fine," he told her. They were new clothes, clean, and they'd last a long time with reasonable care. He hadn't even considered getting her the fancy stuff the women he'd known wanted, after one look at the price tags. But something about her attitude convinced him more was expected. "You're a knock-out," he added.

She turned the edge of the robe over to feel the softness of the garments underneath. "If I only had someone to show it all to . . ."

He felt a pulse in his throat, but he tried to keep his tone brusque. "Go ahead. After all, we're married!"

She came a step closer. "Maybe . . . if I didn't feel like an animal in a cage . . . if I had a key of my own, like other women . . ."

It was too obvious. He caught her arm, and saw her face

whiten. The robe fell half open, and she caught it together again with a movement of desperation. Gordon laughed suddenly, and spun her around away from him. "Go back to your safety, Cuddles. All I want from you is that notebook. When you tell me how to get it, you can go anywhere you want."

She jerked out of his grasp and leaped to the door. Her face was a mask of flaming eyes and teeth exposed beneath taut lips. "Then I'll die here. Because you'll never get it. Never!" She slammed and locked the door, and he heard her break into almost hysterical sobs. He stood there irresolute, and then headed toward the bed.

The panel flopped open suddenly, and she stuck a tear-stained face against it. "And I was going to give you your d-damned b-book, too!" Then the panel went up again, to come down a second later as she began stuffing boxes and clothes back through it; it shut again, at last, with a note of finality.

Gordon studied the heap of packages, noticing that she hadn't shoved through the nicer things. But he couldn't get any amusement out of it. He couldn't figure out why, but he somehow felt like a pig.

He still hadn't solved his problem in the morning, and he was

too logey from the long sleep to think about it. Out of habit, he put on his uniform and went across to Izzy's room. But Izzy was already gone. It was still early. Probably the boy had gone down for early coffee.

Gordon fished into the pocket of his uniform for paper and a pencil to leave a note in case Izzy came back. His fingers found the half notebook cover instead. He drew it out, scowling at it, and started to crumple it. Then he stopped, staring at the piece of imitation leather and paper that wouldn't bend.

His fingers were still stiff as he began tearing off the thin covering with his knife, and he pricked himself; he swore absently, and pried the last scraps of leatheroid off. The paper backing peeled away easily.

Under it lay a thin metal plate that glowed faintly, even in the dim light of Izzy's room! Gordon nearly dropped it. He'd seen such an identification plate once before, in the hands of the head of Solar Security back on Earth. There was no mistaking the flash of colors now. He turned it over, and the second shock hit him.

The printing on it leaped at him: "This will identify the bearer, **BRUCE IRVING GORDON**, as a **PRIME** agent of the Office of Solar Security, empowered to make and execute

any and all directives under the powers of this office." The printing in capitals was obviously done by hand, but with the same catalytic "ink" as the rest of the badge. Whaler must have prepared it and hidden it in the notebook, ready to use—and then died before the secret could be revealed.

A knock sounded from across the hall. Gordon thrust the damning badge as deep into his pouch as he could cram it and looked out. It was Mother Corey, his old face more like putty than ever.

"You've got a visitor—outside," he announced. "Trench. And I don't like the stench of that kind of cop in my place. Get him away, cobber, get him away!"

Gordon found Trench pacing up and down in front of the house, scowling up at it. But the ex-marine snapped around as the seal opened, and then smiled as he saw Gordon in uniform. "Good. At least some men are loyal. Had breakfast, Gordon?"

Gordon shook his head, and realized suddenly that the decision seemed to have been taken out of his hands. They crossed the street and went down half a block to the hole in the wall that was supposed to be a restaurant. "All right," he said, when the

first cup of coffee began waking him. "What's the angle?"

Trench dropped the eyes that had been boring into him. "I'll have to trust you, Gordon. I've never been sure. But either you're loyal now or I can't depend on anyone being loyal. Do you know the situation? No, you wouldn't. Well, things are rough—in fact, hell is popping!"

During the night, it seemed, the Legal Force had been recruiting. Wayne, Arliss, and the rest of the administration had counted on self-interest holding most of the cops loyal to them. They'd been wrong. A few agitators had worked them over, and nearly half of the force had gone over to the Legal side. The administration had also counted on the gangs, but some of them had switched—and all were apparently willing to play both ends against the middle. Legal forces already controlled some of the precincts—and about half of the city. So far, there had been no actual engagements, but that was working itself up.

"So?" Gordon asked. He could have told Trench that the fund was good enough reason for most police deserting, and that only a fool ever counted on gang support. But what was the use?

Trench put his coffee down and yelled for more. It was obvious he'd spent the night without

sleep. "So we're going to need men with guts. We need a floating mop-up squad. I finally got Arliss and Wayne to see that, at least. Gordon, you had training under Whaler—who knew his business, damn him. And you aren't a coward, as most of these fat fools are. I've got a proposition, straight from Wayne."

"I'm listening."

"Here." Trench threw across a platinum badge. "Take that—captain at large—and conscript any of the Municipal Force you want, up to a hundred. Pick out any place you want, train them to handle those damned Legals the way Whaler handled the Stonewall boys. And then scour the city until no Legal dares to crawl out of the cellar! In return, the sky's the limit. Name your own salary, once you've done the job. And no kick-backs, either!"

Gordon picked up the badge slowly and buckled it on, while a grim, satisfied smile spread over Trench's features. The problem seemed to have been solved. Look out for number one, Gordon had told himself; and he couldn't do better. He should have been satisfied. But he felt like Judas picking up the thirty pieces of silver. The picture of the man who'd hung himself after paying his protection got all mixed up with the words of

Whaler and the vision of the old woman who had forgotten her own tragedy to help him. He tried to swallow them with the dregs of his coffee, and they stuck in his throat.

Comes the revolution and we'll all eat strawberries and scream!

A hubbub sounded outside, and Trench grimaced as a police whistle sounded, and a Municipal cop ran by. "We're in enemy territory," he said. "The Legals got this precinct last night. Captain Hendrix and some of his men wanted to come back with full battle equipment and chase them out. I had a hell of a time getting them to take it easy. If we can stall for a week until you can get rolling, and avoid any gunplay that might get Earth completely worked up, we'll win this. I suppose that was some damned fool who tried to go back to his beat."

"Then you'd better look again," Gordon told him. He'd gone to the door and was looking out. Up the narrow little street was rolling a group of about seventy Municipal police and half a dozen small trucks. The men were wearing guns. And up the street a man in bright green uniform was pounding his fist up and down in emphasis as he called in over the precinct box.

"The idiot!" Trench grabbed Gordon and spun out, running

toward the advancing men. "We've got to stop this. Get my car—up the street—call Arliss on the phone—under the dash. Or Wayne. I'll bring Hendrix."

Trench's system made some sense, and this business of marching as to war made none at all. Gordon grabbed the phone from under the dash. A sleepy voice answered to say that Commissioner Arliss and Mayor Wayne were sleeping. They'd had a hard night, and . . .

"Damn it, there's a rebellion going on!" Gordon told the man. Rebellion, rebellion! He'd meant to say revolution, but . . .

Trench was arguing frantically with the pompous figure of Captain Hendrix. From the other end of the street a group of small cars appeared and men began piling out, all dressed in shiny green.

"Who's this?" the phone asked. When Gordon identified himself, there was a snort of disgust. "Yes, yes, congratulations, Trench was quite right, you're fully authorized. Did you call me out of bed just to check on that, young man?"

"No, I—" Then he hung up. Hendrix had dropped to his knees and fired, before Trench could knock the gun from his hands. There was nothing Wayne could do about it now!

There was no answering fire. The Legals simply came boiling down the street, equipped with long pikes with lead-weighted ends. And Hendrix came charging up, with his men straggling behind him. Gordon was squarely in the middle. He considered staying in Trench's car and letting it roll past him. But he'd taken the damned badge.

"Hell," he said in disgust. He climbed out, just as the two groups met. It all had a curious feeling of unreality, as if none of it mattered. Emotionally, it wasn't his fight.

Then a man jumped for him, swinging a pike, and the feeling was suddenly gone. His hand snapped down sharply for a rock on the street. The pike whistled over his head, barely missing, and he was up, squashing the big stone into the face of the other. He jerked the pike away, kicked the man in the neck as he fell, and unsheathed his knife with the other hand.

Trench was a few feet away. The man might be a louse, but he was also a fighting machine of first order, still. He'd already captured one of the pikes. Now he grinned tightly at Gordon and began moving toward him. Gordon nodded—in a brawl such as this, two working together had a distinct advantage. He shortened his grip and brought the pike

head up from underneath against a chin that suddenly rained teeth and blood. The first rush had brought the men too close together for good fighting, and they were only beginning to spread out.

Then a yell sounded as more Legals poured down the street. One of them was obviously Izzy, wearing the same green as the others!

Gordon felt something hit his back, and instinctively fell, soaking up the blow. It sent hot hell lancing up his nerves, but he managed to bend his neck and roll, coming to his feet. His knife slashed upwards, and the Legal fell—almost on top of the Security badge that had dropped from Gordon's pouch.

He jerked himself down and scooped it up, his eyes darting for Trench. He stuffed it back, ducking a blow. Then his eyes fell on the entrance to Mother Corey's house—with Sheila Corey coming out of the seal!

Gordon threw himself back, trying to get out of the fight and get to her. He stepped on a face, and stumbled. The battle was moving down the street, though, and it looked as if he might make it. He had to get to her before . . .

He hadn't been watching as closely as he should. He saw the pike coming down and tried to

duck. It hit him on the shoulder, driving him to his knees. Pain seemed to weld him to the street, but he fought up through it somehow. The pike went up again, and he forced his hand back with the knife and began the labored effort of the throw.

The knife beat the pike, but only by a microsecond. It went home into the Legal's throat, but the pike came down, carried by momentum. Gordon tried to duck, and almost made it. It was only a glancing blow when it hit, but the side of his head rang with agony, and blackness spread from it.

He fought against unconsciousness, even while he felt himself falling. There was no sensation as he hit the street. He lay there, while consciousness came and went in sick waves. But somehow, he got his hands under him and forced himself to his knees. Inch by aching inch, he struggled to his feet, forcing the blackness away. He stood there, reeling, with a red haze over everything.

Through it, he painfully focussed his eyes and began turning his head. Trench was running toward him, looking like someone in a magenta, slow-motion movie. Back further, Sheila

Corey had stooped to recover a fallen pike and now was headed for him. Then Trench stopped as two of the Legal force closed in on him.

Another wave of the blackness rolled over him, but he fought it off and refocussed his eyes. Sheila was almost up to him now, with the pike raised for the final stroke. He staggered to meet her, but his feet refused to co-ordinate. He twisted himself around, to stare at the gleaming point of a knife in the hands of the Legal who had come up behind him.

Then something crashed against his shoulder, and there was the beginning of a scream, followed by a spattering crunch. Something fell on him, driving the breath from his lungs. The knife dropped in front of him and he reached for it. He saw his fingers touch and contract—and then the blackness finally won!

He was vaguely conscious later of looking up to see Sheila dragging him into some entrance, while Trench ran toward them. Sheila and Trench together—and the Security badge was still in his pouch!

(To be concluded)

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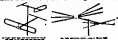
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Mason picks up the phone. A voice says: "See Carlin tonight. Tell him to get another partner. Matter of life and death!" But Carlin never HAD a partner! Yet he's MURDERED!

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Mason sees a girl creeping from George Alder's estate. She hands him a letter. "Alder will do ANYTHING to get this letter," she says. "You must stop him!" But someone else wants Mason to it — by killing Alder!

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